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BROTHER GABRIEL

By

THE AUTHOR OF

"KITTY"


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BROTHER GABRIEL.

VOL. III.

BROTHER GABRIEL

BY

M. BETHAM-EDWARDS

AUTHOR OF

"KITTY," "DOCTOR JACOB," "BRIDGET,"
"A WINTER WITH THE SWALLOWS,"

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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BROTHER GABRIEL.

CHAPTER I.

A FAR-OFF FUTURE.

WHEN the working day was over, however, and unwelcome talk seemed bearable beside the crackling hearth and book-laden table, Zoë told Gabriel all that had happened in a few words.

"It was much better that Monsieur Hervé should know everything," she said, proudly. "Madame Pitache was wrong to conceal it from the beginning. We have no right to

make ourselves appear what we are not, and if the truth brings us harm, we shall at least no longer live in a perpetual dread of discovery. I am not at all sure that we shall be allowed to stay on after this disclosure; we must prepare ourselves for dismissal."

"And it is I who bring you again and again into trouble," Gabriel replied, very sorrowfully. "Zoë, how smooth and pleasant your life might be but for me! I ought to leave you free to act as you please. I have no right thus to encroach upon your sisterly affection. Let us part company, if it is for your welfare and happiness."

Zoë pondered for a little, and then said, looking at it him in the frankest manner,

"It is quite likely that we shall be compelled to go our own ways, and I have had

the possibility before my mind often. But it is not such propositions as Monsieur Hervé's that would divide us. I shall never marry now." She looked into the fire, and added—"Because I am not married to Lionel."

Seeing that her companion looked more sorrowful than before, she went on, striving to put her meaning before him with the least possible painfulness,

"I will not allude to this again, and only do so now in order that you may understand my conduct. It has made me happy to be of use to you hitherto, and to render your life less dreary than it would have been alone. That is no reason why we should find it always desirable to make a home together. The position may prove too difficult, too embarrassing—and, as I said to

you the other day, you may yourself desire to change it. Not one, but a dozen circumstances might happen to bring this about."

"I have told you again and again that you are more to me than anything else in the world," the young man said, passionately and bitterly. "If you cast me off, you do me a greater injury than you know. You forget that you have friends, but that without you I am utterly friendless and alone."

"No, I do not forget it. I have it before my mind always. I wish it were not so," she said, pleading as much for his happiness and peace of mind as her own. "That is why I should willingly leave this place, and see you doing something in the world, and mixing among men. This isolation, this dependence upon one friendship only—and

that a woman's—is narrowing and unsatisfactory. You need action, stimulus, sympathy. You want to be roused, to be lifted out of yourself, to be helped onward far more than I can help you."

Her vehemence, so contrasted with the habitually calm demeanour to which he was accustomed, struck him painfully. He felt as if the intercourse of the past month, the toil mutually shared, the daily pleasures and aspirations enjoyed in common, had, after all, effected nothing—that they were still wide apart, the merest acquaintances, utterly unable to read each other's inner thoughts and hidden motives. She, in her turn, could not in the least understand the sting inflicted by every one of her candid words. The two had been sitting down to the same board, sheltered under an identical

roof, talking together for the better part of a year, and were yet all but strangers.

"Why should you be vexed at hearing the truth?" she began, after a long pause. "Have you not yourself thought of these things? I am sure at times the monotony and inaction of this existence have weighed upon your spirits, and you must have felt, as I do, that difficulties might arise out of our false position. You are a little younger than I, and for that reason I hoped that all would go well." She blushed crimson, and added—"But all does not go well, as you see. We do not understand each other; we see things from different points of view; we both expect too much."

It was now his turn to explain himself, for he saw that she had done. Taking up a piece of needlework, she absorbed herself

in it assiduously, never once looking up during his long explanation.

"Zoë," he began, very timidly, gaining confidence and accent as he went on, "if all does not go well, perhaps the fault is mine. I have not quite understood till now the nature of your feeling for your cousin. What passed between you before his departure you never told me, and I had no right to inquire. You were separated—you were holding no communication with each other. I naturally came to the conclusion that something had happened to divide you, and also that, whatever it was, time would heal the wound. I looked forward to a future when we might talk of Lionel Delmar as easily as of anything else, and when you would tell me all; and I looked forward farther even than this. I thought it

possible, even probable, that some day or other, after long years of intercourse, you might feel for me something like the affection you have felt for him."

She put down her work now in great perturbation, and rising, stood before him, as if she thought, by thus confronting each other, they would sooner explain everything, and end this unhappy discourse.

"Do not speak of it," she said, implor-ingly. "Remember that we are living under one roof as brother and sister, and are bound to keep up the fiction whilst such a compact lasts. It is unfair to act otherwise."

"Unfair to you, you would say?" he asked, self-reproachfully. "But it is better for once and for all that we understand each other, and then you shall decide the

future as you judge best. Was it foolish—was it wrong of me to indulge in these dreams? You know what kind of ideal I indulged in of old. I saw myself in those misguided, yet blissful days, a chosen vessel of celestial grace—a light that should burn brightly in a benighted place. There were no lengths of egotistical enthusiasm to which I was not ready to go, so assured did I feel of having chosen the best part God gives in these days. But when I lost all this, I found something better to take its place."

He glanced at her with a look of inexpressible reverence and yearning, and added—

"I had not far to seek for a lovelier ideal. I saw you, and from that moment all human life seemed transfigured in my

eyes. I recognised a nature, human like my own, and yet infinitely above me, a nature with which I had kinship, although I seemed very far off. Zoë, do not blame me if I exalted you into the likeness of an angel. You have behaved angelically to me, and your looks were in harmony with your deeds. How could I help feeling for you something more like worship than human affection? But in time all this was changed, and I wanted you to come down from your pedestal and dwell by my side—to live with me always in the closest bonds, as other mortals do."

"Oh, Gabriel!" she cried, bursting into tears, and reseating herself by the table, "is it so? Then, indeed, there is no help for it, and we must part."

"I am speaking of a far-off future only—

of what appeared to me as a would-be possibility rather than a likelihood. I did not dream of hinting my wishes for years to come, but I have long felt how such an assurance of happiness would change the tenor of our life. I live now under a perpetual fear of losing you, but were it otherwise, everything would be different. We could better help each other, confide in each other more, and have no dread of discovery hanging over our heads——"

Seeing that she still wept on, he said, in a tone of forced decision and cheerfulness,

"But do not grieve. I will never touch upon the subject again. I will do all that you wish, even leave you, if thereby you would be happier. Why should you weep?"

"Because I can no longer help or com-

fort you," she answered. "We must part, Gabriel; there is no other way, and the mischief is of your own doing."

She could say no more, and he also lacked courage to excuse himself, no matter in how clumsy a fashion. Murmuring a hasty good-night, she shut herself up in her room, leaving him alone to self-reproachful and desolating thoughts.

CHAPTER II.

THE UNKIND WORLD.

ZOËË dropped into a chair, still weeping with mortification and dismay. Perhaps she resented Gabriel's confession unjustifiably in those first moments of wounded pride, saying to herself that all her compassion and sisterly regard for him were gone, and that henceforth, by sheer fault of his, she was free to regard her own interest only. She saw clearly now that they must part, and each choose a separate way, as it

seemed best to themselves. But to whom could she go? Where could she make a new home? Huberte was married; Aunt Félicité had adopted a favourite niece; her own ties in England were severed. Surely no one in the wide world was so forlorn as she!

As she reviewed the past few months, she could not take blame to herself for anything she had done or said amiss. Gabriel only was in the wrong, and she accused him of cruelly abusing her confidence. How much had she not sacrificed for him, and this was her reward! Whatever his secret wishes, there was one matter on which he was in honour bound to keep silence. Thus bitterly she pondered over what had happened, and she would not close her eyes till the future was clearly marked out.

They must part, and soon; but as Gabriel might find the most difficulty in obtaining occupation, she determined to leave him at St. Yves, if Monsieur Hervé could be prevailed upon to retain him without her, and set out to make her fortunes as best she could. She would go to Huberte, and consult with her as to what was best to do. There were surely isolated spots in France where an English teacher could gain a humble livelihood? And if Huberte could not help, she would consult Aunt Félicité. Yes, this must be done at once, and Gabriel should know her plans the first thing next morning.

But when morning came he looked so haggard with self-reproach, and so utterly spiritless and woe-begone, that she had no heart to tell him her resolution. She must

at least wait till the morrow. Perhaps he might take the initiative, or some unexpected circumstance might further this explanation.

What really did happen, however, was not of propitious augury, for the next day came a polite but coldly-worded letter of dismissal.

From hints that had been privately dropped to him, Monsieur Hervé wrote, he had felt it his duty to inquire more particularly of common friends into their history, and though he could not say that it was to their discredit morally, the result was of a nature to cause him profound uneasiness. With the utmost reluctance, therefore, he was compelled to deprive himself of their valuable services, and he could only regret that, with the best intentions in the world,

such old and valued friends as Monsieur and Madame Pitache should have brought about these complications.

Zoë was the first to speak.

"There is no help for it now. We must part, and think of what is best for you to do."

He looked up inquiringly.

"For myself, my plans are made," then she looked straight into his face, and added—"We must each go our own way, and not live together under false pretences any longer. I had decided upon this before getting Monsieur Hervé's letter."

"And what will you do?" he asked.

"I shall go to Huberte, and be guided by her. But I cannot stay at Les Ponts, of course."

Then she broke off, colouring painfully, she did not wish to reproach him for what was hardly his own fault.

"I understand. Into what dire straits I have brought you," he said, looking utterly overcome. "From the beginning of our acquaintance all the benefit has been on your side, all the obligation and injury on mine. It is on my account, of course, that you cannot return to Les Ponts, and resume your old occupation there. Your worldly prospects have been twice ruined through me."

"What is done cannot be undone," Zoë said, cheerfully. "Let us not think of the past, but the future. It is your career that I feel most concerned about. Perhaps if we explain everything to Monsieur Hervé

he would consent to retain you. We could but try."

Gabriel looked sorrowful and unsuggestive.

"We had better ask for an interview this morning. There is no time for delay," she added, in the same quiet tone of decision. His impassibility irritated her, though she was doing her best to conceal it.

"As you think best," he replied, mechanically.

"But it is also as you think best, dear brother," she added, with insistance. "The time has come, not for useless brooding and despondency, but for action, and we must do all we can to help each other."

With that she rose from the breakfast-table, and going to the window, looked out

into the bright morning with a troubled face. There were birds twittering on the boughs, glossy green leaves pricking the clear blue sky, already sunshine gilding the quiet sea. On that January morning the outer world seemed a fair and happy place, and how opposed to it were the turmoil and perplexity of human life! She had tried to do what was right, and yet it seemed now as if all these accumulated vexations must be brought about partly by fault of hers.

Gabriel's self-questionings were much more painful. He recalled her as he had first seen her two years ago, full of grace, vivacity, and joy, and he contrasted with that sweet picture the one before him now. He noted to-day for the first time the lines imprinted by care on the clear brow, the

paleness of the softly outlined cheeks, the contraction of the lips, saying to himself again and again—the change is of my doing.

The day's routine was gone through in the ordinary way. Monsieur Hervé's absence prevented the proposed explanation, and nothing unusual occurred till the two met at tea-time. They separated at the office door, instead of taking their habitual stroll together, Zoë having housewifely errands, Gabriel wanting to be alone. But the moment he entered the little parlour at nightfall he saw that something unwonted had happened. The fire blazed brightly, the cheerful board was spread, the cat purred on the hearth. Only Zoë's face was out of keeping with the rest. She was very pale, and had evidently been weeping; but

she stammered out a word of welcome, and began to occupy herself with the tea-things as usual.

Self-control and concealment were, however, no longer possible. The tea-cup dropped from her trembling hand, and a sympathetic word from Gabriel unsealed her lips.

"There are things a woman cannot bear," she cried, proudly, not sitting down by his side as if he could counsel and comfort, but walking up and down the room before him, dashing away the passionate tears. "A woman has no mercy for other women. The Inquisitors of the Middle Ages were not half so cruel as they can be to each other, though outwardly appearing gentle and good. Huberte has always said so, but I would not believe her. It is insensate—it

is monstrous that, because I have acted unwisely and imprudently, I should be scorned in the public streets, matched, I suppose, with those poor creatures irreproachable women do not speak of. I met Berthe Hervé this afternoon, and instead of coming forward and greeting me cordially, as she always does, she plucked her maid by the gown, and, looking me straight in the face, passed on without a word."

She sat down, and bowed her head over her closed hands a moment, sobbing; then added, with still more passionate vindictiveness,

"But that is not the worst. A little farther on I met her mother, and she at least, for her friend's sake, if not for mine, might have been expected to show some feeling. She behaved exactly as Berthe had

done. I see now what my conduct looks like in their eyes. Oh! Gabriel, how can this ever be put right?"

He took a chair beside her, and did his best to soothe and comfort, but in vain. The angry tears would have their way, and every ejaculation was more fiercely vindictive than the last.

It seemed to her, in those first moments of intense humiliation, that she hated the whole world, most of all two unhappy individuals named Gabriel and Zoë. She could hardly find language emphatic enough for her wounded pride and self-reproach.

"Why did we allow ourselves to be so ill-guided, so misled?" she said. "We should have listened, at least, to Madame Pitache, had she spoken in time. Oh! Gabriel, how

could you propose, how could I consent to such a compact?"

"But St. Yves is not the whole world," he said, eagerly and hopefully; he would not add to her wretchedness by deprecating such speeches. "The voice of slander will not follow us to the New World. We can be happy there," he added, doubtfully—"that is—if you will——"

"You seem to forget that misfortune falls upon us unequally. Evil report cannot harm a man as it does a woman. Most likely Monsieur Hervé would consent to retain you as a clerk, though he does not think me fit to speak to his daughter. One must have lived in the world to understand these things."

Then she dried her tears, and moving away from him, sat down with a white, unreadable face.

"Let us not talk any more to-night," she said. "All the talking in the world cannot help us—nothing can help us."

For the moment he acquiesced in her despondent mood, having much to say, but feeling that the opportune moment had not yet come. They ate and drank without a word, and when the meal was over, separated, after interchanging a mechanical good night.

CHAPTER III.

BROTHER BY ADOPTION.

TWO or three days passed, and things grew worse instead of better for both. Zoë persistently avoided any approach to confidential talk, and looked unhappy and uncommunicative, as if, indeed, nothing would ever again unlock those silent lips, and give life to those down-looking eyes. In spite of her reticence and self-restraint, for she behaved to him exactly as of old, he read something of her secret thoughts. He saw that she was inwardly fighting,

struggling against her conscious injustice to him. She knew as plainly as he could tell her that she had wronged him, was wronging him still, but as yet indignation and outraged womanly pride held sway, and she was mastered by a passion stronger than herself.

But all he could not know. He did not see her in her moments of keenest anguish, when shedding burning tears over her isolation and her shame. Since evil report had followed her to this remote spot, where, indeed, could she hide herself from the tongue of slander? Naturally, she exaggerated the feeling against her, seeing herself followed and hunted down wherever she might go, condemned to a perpetual dread of discovery and discredit from which there was no escape.

And the most stinging thought of all was this—What would Lionel say if the story ever came to his ears? What would he think of her conduct?

It was strange that these questions had never arisen before, but so natural had it seemed to go to Gabriel's aid in the beginning, and so single-minded had her purpose been throughout, that she had never dreamed of such misinterpretation. Now she felt ready to accept the blame, to criminate herself for doing evil that good might come, and saving Gabriel from pain in small things that he might suffer all the more acutely in great.

He, in his turn, was reproaching himself more bitterly still. He said that there was no sacrifice he would not make by way of atonement for the wrong he had done her,

even were it a parting for once and for all. But would she insist upon this? He hardly dreaded as much.

After waiting patiently till the passion of her grief was spent, he paved the way to a final understanding by the quiet query—

"Monsieur Hervé has returned; but before speaking to him, had we not better decide upon what is best to do?"

"I must go to Huberte," she replied, without raising her eyes.

"Is that your final decision?"

"There is no choice for me. She will give me a home for a time, and perhaps I can stay a little with Aunt Félicité afterwards. If Monsieur Hervé consents to retain you, would you not do well to accept his offer?"

"Then you have made up your mind to leave me?" he asked. He did not say—"Is this the end of our long companionship and close sympathy? Am I nothing to you?"

Something of these thoughts was, however, written in his face, for she added, apologetically,

"It is not my fault that we must part, Gabriel. Do you not see that it is necessary? I have my livelihood to earn and no one to help me here, whilst your case is entirely different. I feel sure you can stay, if you choose."

Seeing that he made no reply, she continued,

"I have been of some use to you, and that will always be a consolation to me in the future. We were foolish and wrong to

enter into such a compact in the first instance, but the harm is done and cannot be repaired now."

She smiled at him sadly through her tears, and stretched out her hand in token of reconciliation, adding,

"It was not wholly your fault, and certainly not all mine, that I regarded you as something different from an ordinary human being," here she smiled again, "but certainly on a higher level than other mortals. Then you were younger by several years than I, and I felt towards you the protectiveness of an elder sister. I never dreamed that you would appear to me in any other light. We have both been visionaries, and our punishment is well merited."

The old friendliness and old confidence

had come back now, and, sitting once more opposite to the Zoë of former days, he felt that he might now speak without fear of being misunderstood.

"Dear sister," he began, humble no longer, but speaking out proudly and almost coldly. "I do not think, as yet, we at all clearly understand each other; perhaps human beings never do; but I want, as far as possible, to make my motives plain to you, ere it is too late. When I entreated you to follow me and share my fortunes, I had no idea of asking a great sacrifice at your hands. You admitted that the life with your friends was distasteful, and you put forward no objections on other grounds; you never once named your cousin to me."

"Why speak of him now?" she murmur-

ed, bending down her face to hide her blushes.

"Because I am bound to speak of him, because I should never have spoken to you as I did a few days ago had you told me how it was with you and him for once and for all. Oh, why, when calling me brother, did you withhold a sister's confidence? Think of all the unhappiness that might have been avoided had you trusted me a little more? You must see that in this matter you were unjust to your cousin, yourself, and to me," continued the young man, very earnestly. "But I will not say another word by way of reproach. You have been so good to me that I can never repay it, do what I will; and if we are separated now, my chances of serving you will be at an end. I want you to

understand why I have seemed to acquiesce so apathetically, perhaps unworthily, you will say, in a compact having all the benefit and obligation on my side, and why I have not tried to advance my own prospects and yours also more energetically. I have been waiting and hoping. I felt from the first that in time a way of living worthily would open itself to me, of doing something—not after the pattern of my early dreams"—and here he smiled sadly—"but praiseworthy nevertheless—even noble, perhaps, if you were by to help. And all this time you read nothing of my thoughts, in your heart of hearts you were on the verge of despising me."

"Nay," she said, quickly. "I think I hardly blamed you at all, but the system that had made you what you were. You

have not been hitherto the maker of your fortunes."

"I will be in the future. I am no longer the Gabriel you first knew," he went on. "The transformation is at work every day, and already my former life seems a vision, and my former self an unreality. Oh! if you would only abide with me a little longer!"

"That would hinder, and not help you," she answered, with a look of pained decision. "My wand is broken. I can never be of use to you any more." She did not add—"and all through fault of yours," but he saw the thought in her face, and held his peace.

"Oh! Zoë, is this your last word? Think how evil-fated, how forlorn we are! Will you deprive yourself of my poor ser-

vices? Will you cut me off from the only friendship I possess? Take my solemn promise never again, as long as I live, to speak to you of my dreams and dearest wishes, only let us toil together and comfort each other whilst we may."

Long and earnestly he pleaded, she listening without a word. Her indignation and anger were past, and she was as full of pity for him as for herself. Whichever way she looked she saw gloom and perplexity; yet it seemed as if there was no other remedy for the ills now heaped upon their heads but this. They must part, and never cross each other's path again.

The alternative, if unbearable to him, had pain for her. In those first months of quiet companionship, nothing had occurred to mar the daily harmony of existence. She had

in deed and in truth learned to look upon him as a brother, and to love him as a sister might. Could they forget what had happened since, and live friendlily and smoothly as of old? Again and again she said that it was impossible.

CHAPTER IV.

A FATEFUL JOURNEY.

THERE is a favourite ending to Greek plays which lingers on the memory, and freely rendered, may stand thus—Many unhoped-for issues are brought about by the gods. Much that we looked for never comes to pass, and out of labyrinthine difficulties Providence finds a way. From time to time it will happen that our firmest decisions and most uncompromising convictions are brought to nought, we know not how. The result

being a condition of things we once supposed impossible.

So it was with these two friends. On a bright February morning, soon after this conversation, Zoë woke up to the consciousness that, by a variety of complex circumstances, she had been induced to act in exact contradiction to her wishes. The thing seemed incredible, but so it was. By force of insistance, and many unexpected accidents in his favour, Gabriel's point was gained. They were not to be separated, after all, at least, for the time being, and they were to sail for a quite new settlement in the New World together, to accept there just what bread-winning should come in their way. Here their plans ended. Zoë could but hope that she had done wisely for him, if not for herself. He had given his

solemn promise never again to speak to her except as a brother might, and on the strength of that promise she yielded.

But other things besides his promise pleaded for Gabriel. In the first place, she saw that he was ill, and in the second, unhappy. A fever, indeed, not of remorse, nor of vindictiveness, nor of ambition, but something made up of all these, was burning within him. His cheeks were hollow, his complexion pale even to whiteness, his limbs attenuated, and, strangely enough, for the first time she now perceived the change. By-and-by, when he should be himself again—strong, animated, joyous—she could leave him, but not yet. He wore the look of a man whose mind was unhealthily at work upon the reparation of bitter wrongs, whose inner eye was perpetually turned

upon himself. Oh! if she could but win him back to natural, healthful thought, and his old habits of viewing things contentedly! This, at present, was her sole care.

Then there was the ever-recurring sense of their isolation. They were alone in the world, thrown together by as strange a mischance as had ever knit two human destinies. Go where she might, her life was, in a certain sense, bound up with his, by virtue of common suffering and common shame. Seas might divide them, and circumstance, and the course of long years, but the past could never be obliterated. Whatever future was in store for them, they would always remember the time they had spent in this old-world spot—outcasts, exiles, and alone.

And Delmar? Had she forgotten him?

His silence of so many months was wholly unexpected, and she could only interpret it in one way. He had forgotten, or was trying to forget her. Or, worse still, he had deceived her, and, in asking her to go with him a year ago, had but acted as Huberte said. But no, this she could not believe. She tried to banish him from her memory; that was all.

It was an inexpressible relief to turn to the practical questions involved in their departure, and from this point of view she hailed the project joyfully.

"Gabriel," she said, on the first evening after the decision had been made, "there is no time to be lost in arranging everything, if we start so soon as we think. I must go

to Les Ponts and draw my little savings out of the bank."

He naturally acquiesced.

"As the journey must be made, I prefer to make it at once; so, if permission is to be had, I will start to-morrow."

"Nay, wait a few days," he urged.

"Dear Gabriel, I would much rather do it at once. Please let me have my way," she said, and, of course, he yielded.

This little conversation had taken place two days before, and when Zoë woke up on this brilliant spring morning, it was with a bewildering sense of the revolution about to take place in her life. In a few hours she was to start for Les Ponts, to bid adieu to her old friends—an act which in itself seemed the renunciation of all that had been—a farewell, indeed, to the familiar

Zoë of former days. On her return from this errand, only a few short weeks would separate her old life from the new. She should have sailed with Gabriel for the Far West. Beautiful France, the land of her adoption, would be quitted, she could but believe for ever.

She started at noon, travelling for several hours by coach, then by railway throughout the clear, starry February night, reaching the City of Bridges soon after sunrise. It was with a sense of exhilaration she found herself once more in the glittering, animated streets. The sun shone out from a cloudless sky, the river gleamed smooth and clear, the pleasant walks alongside were all life and movement.

As she walked amid these familiar scenes, how vividly everything came back!—the

walks with Lionel, the pleasant talks under his roof with Father Gabriel, the cheerful daily labour in the convents, the final crisis! For a moment she felt as if only the old life were real and true, and all else a dream; but soon it seemed as if indeed all here had been illusions and chimeras, and the little home, with Gabriel far away, alone remained of fact and reality.

She had written to Huberte without mentioning the probable time of her arrival, so she lingered on her way, full of mingled retrospection, and looking forward. Although early, the shops were already open, and as she passed a familiar street, it occurred to her that she might as well get over the most painful part of her business at once. She carried in her satchel the

little document Delmar had pressed upon her with such affectionate insistance on that well-remembered autumn afternoon of their last ramble; and it was her intention now to yield it up, thus severing the only link that bound them together. Why should she keep up a remembrance of him? Why retain a pledge of his kindness any longer? The paper would be sure to reach him through his bankers, and he could but discern the significance of the act. She had never for a moment intended to accept his money, no matter in what dire straits she might find herself; but till now alike motive and opportunity lacked for a final rejection of all possible help from him. She was going into a new world and entering upou a new life with Gabriel.

His long silence surely meant forgetfulness or coldness. Better for both that she should forget his intended kindness.

So without any timidity or hesitation she presented herself in the dingy little counting-house, and drew from her purse the paper Lionel had given her with so many injunctions a year and a half ago. How well she remembered every incident attending the circumstance!—her own coldness in receiving, his eagerness in giving. From that day to this she had never once so much as glanced at the little document, which she now unfolded with trembling fingers and misty eyes.

There were two clerks in attendance, smoking their matutinal cigar, and the elder, laying it aside, advanced towards his sweet client curiously. He inspected her

missive with great care, asked one or two questions, then begging her to take a chair, sat down to draw up a form of receipt.

Looking up on a sudden from his desk, he said, with rather a mystified air, evidently not at all comprehending Zoë's appearance at that special moment,

"You have, perhaps, been on a journey, and are, therefore, not aware that Monsieur Delmar was here two days ago?"

She had prepared herself to talk of Lionel calmly here, but was naturally little armed against such a surprise as this. With the tell-tale blushes burning through her gauze veil, no, she said, she did not know that her cousin was in Europe. She had just come from St. Yves en Finistère, and had no recent news of him.

"Monsieur Delmar is like the rest of his countrymen—perpetually on the wing," resumed the clerk, who had been on friendly terms with his client during his residence at Les Ponts—"here to-day, there to-morrow. It is astonishing! When he first presented himself at my office, he said he should probably be here some time. A few hours later, he brought word that he had changed all his plans and was going straight back to America."

"Is he gone?" Zoë asked, fluttering from head to foot. She was holding on to the counter now with both hands, overcome by a horrible dread of screaming, swooning, or committing any other foolishly feminine act. A minute or two later, and she had forced herself to be calm.

"To the best of my knowledge he is, but the start was not to be made from here. He told me that, instead of returning to Bordeaux, he intended, for some reason or other which he did not mention, to sail from Brest. Stay, I can give you the name of the ship, for I have to write to him on business, and the letter will be sent straight aboard."

He rose, and placed in Zoë's still trembling fingers a little printed circular, headed by a map and an engraving of the fast-sailing vessel *Dominateur*, to start on such and such a day from Brest for New York. Whilst her interlocutor continued his writing, she gazed on the paper with a thousand passionate thoughts hurrying through her brain. Lionel then had come, had gone, was parted from

her now more irrevocably than ever. He had most likely seen Huberte and learned of her approaching departure, and here her heart gave a great leap. Perhaps he wished to see her abiding place before starting homeward, and that was why he intended to sail from Brest? He would, at least, get sight of St. Yves from the bay.

"Which route do these ships take?" she asked, suddenly looking up.

For a moment all agitation had passed, her voice was steady, and she waited intently for the answer.

The clerk, only too willing to prolong an interview with so interesting a customer, and divining romance in the air, hereupon quitted his stool and moved to her side. Hardly knowing whether to admire most the abundance of rich brown hair dis-

played to such advantage by the little travelling-hat, or the smooth, rosy-red cheeks bent so eagerly over the map, he began his explanation.

"See," he said, drawing his pencil across the indicated route. "The ship stops here, and here, and here, for the sake of taking in coals, freight, and passengers. It is not a mail-steamer, but a sailing-vessel, you understand, so that it diverges a little from the ordinary route, which would take this direction."

Whilst he thus elaborately described the two sea-lines which Delmar's ship was to take and avoid, she was seeing and understanding one point of his narrative only, namely, that it must pass the coast of Finistère. There could be no doubt of it. She might watch from her favourite bit of

shore the vessel that bore him away from her for ever.

"About what time would be occupied in reaching this part of the coast?" she said, placing her finger on the little port of Roscoff, opposite the Druidesses' Island.

"I am no sailor, but provided that the ship starts punctually, and that the wind is fair, I should say in twelve hours. Everything, of course, depends upon the weather," answered the clerk, no longer in doubt as to the romantic cause of Zoë's blushes.

Zoë listened, with her eyes still riveted to the map. She was mentally calculating the probabilities in her favour. Lionel was already on his way to Brest, but by returning that night, she should in all likelihood overtake him. This short stay would allow of a few hours' interview with Huberte, and

all other business she had to do. The mail train for Finistère started at nightfall. Yes, she would decide to go back at once, and stay at Roscoff till the *Dominateur* had sailed by.

"Is there anything else you wish me to tell you?" asked the clerk, lingering over his delightful task of imparting information to so lovely a listener. "I am entirely at your service."

"Thank you," Zoë answered, rising. "I have no other questions to put to you. But I will keep this little map, if you please."

"Certainly. I will, of course, mention to my client that you in person deposited the document?"

"As you please. I shall, however, write to Mr. Delmar myself," Zoë said; then she bowed, and went on her way.

The rest of her business was accomplished with feverish haste. Gabriel's commissions were fulfilled with equal promptitude. The transaction at her own banker's occupied a few minutes only, and by mid-day she rang at Huberte's door, pale and weary, it is true, but in the strangest state of excitement, which might easily be taken for exhilaration. Her eyes were bright, her cheeks delicately flushed; she talked much more than was her wont.

The breakfast was a cheerful one. Huberte, who had now been married for some time, was calm and demure. Monsieur Papotte paid old-fashioned compliments to his wife's guest, and talked of married bliss in high-flowing strains, after the manner of bridegrooms. Both, gazing upon Zoë's animated face, felt convinced in their own

minds that she was in love with the friend she was about to follow to the New World. When Monsieur Papotte retired, the two women sat in close conclave talking of the times that had been, and were to be—Zoë not yet daring to speak of Lionel, Huberte purposely refraining from the difficult topic, Zoë waiting expectant.

At last, seeing that the short afternoon hours were on the wane, and that, with Monsieur Papotte's return to dinner, all further tête-à-tête would be over, she said, looking straight into her friend's eyes—

"What did my cousin say to you yesterday, Huberte, and what did you say to him?"

"Zoë, you cannot surely be foolish enough to retain any sentimental feeling for that man?—and you an Englishwoman, too!"

"Answer me, Huberte. Lionel is nothing to me now; but I must know this before I go away."

"I received him somewhat coldly, as was only natural. I have never forgiven him for his behaviour to you," Huberte began, "but he entered gaily, and was cordial and pleasant. He wanted to know where you were, and what had happened to you since he went away. I told him. Nothing more passed between us."

"But he must have made some remark?"

"He listened in silence after a few preliminary questions," Huberte continued, a little triumphantly; she was glad to shake Zoë's confidence in her former idol, "and when I came to the end, when I told him that you were going to settle in the Far West with Gabriel, he turned very white,

thanked me formally for the information I had given him, and without another word took his leave."

Zoë walked to the open window and stood for a few minutes burying her face in the flowers. When she returned to her seat she had recovered self-possession.

"Now tell me of yourself, dearest Huberte," she said, cheerfully, "you are very happy, I am sure."

"Monsieur Papotte is the kindest man in the world. I am indeed fortunate. But be guided by me, Zoë, do not expect perfection from your husband, whoever he may be, or entire felicity in your new condition. Marriage is a magnifying glass perpetually turned upon us, exaggerating both defects and virtues. You will have your patience exercised. You will lose some illusions."

"And the school—and your step-daughters?"

"The affairs of the school are mending, and the two girls give me no trouble. I could not have imagined step-children would be so dutiful. Yes, I wish all wives had no more to complain of than I have," Huberte answered, in the same matter-of-fact way. "There are little drawbacks, of course. Monsieur Papotte has a chronic cold, and is very fidgety about draughts. I love plenty of air, and am well-nigh stifled when he is in the house. But I make no complaints. I repeat, I am a woman to be envied."

"Dear Aunt Félicité! I had come fully intending to pay her a parting visit," Zoë said, after a time, "and now I cannot. Say all kinds of affectionate things for me, Huberte."



"Why cannot you go to her?" Huberte said, sharply. "She will think it ungrateful to grudge her two days, for it could be accomplished in that. What presses you?"

Zoë blushed scarlet, and stammered an incoherent excuse. She could write a parting letter and explain everything to her kind old friend, she said. Aunt Félicité would understand.

Then they talked of other things, their confabulation being brought to an end long before they had done. Zoë kept up her high spirits to the last, Huberte was all cheerfulness and composure. The farewell dinner passed off in the pleasantest manner. There was only one change Zoë marked in her friend. Huberte had lost none of her sententiousness and sentimentality since be-

coming a wife, nor was she less staid in manner, less proudly reserved, less pointedly sedate where her own feelings were concerned. But she had ceased to be romantic. She never once alluded to the Beard!

CHAPTER V.

ON THE DRUIDESSES' ISLAND.

BY nightfall, therefore, Zoë was speeding back to St. Yves, possessed with one idea only. She determined to see Lionel's ship, if but as a speck upon the blue! When that last farewell had been taken, she would absorb herself in her new life, and never even let thought of him trouble her peace any more.

Thus she pondered to herself, as, wrapped in her grey travelling-cloak, she saw the dim grey landscapes flit by. It was an ex-

press train she had taken, but there were halts to be made for the diligence at the end, and she could not expect to reach her destination ere sunset next day. Should she arrive too late? That question forced itself upon her mind with passionate reiteration. What if her journey and her sacrifice to duty were made in vain?

For she felt that she was wronging Gabriel in thus surrendering herself to a sudden impulse with which he had nothing to do. She ought to banish Lionel from her memory now and for ever; she ought to flee from the temptation besetting her, instead of which she encouraged it. But it was for the last time!

After a time she drowsed, dreaming strangely, waking up now and then to dream on with fresh abandonment. There

was no one in the compartment, and once, when she woke after wonderfully real visions of old days and old delights, she covered her face and wept bitterly. But this mood did not last long. For the most part, the twenty-four hours of travel were passed in the same wild, unrepressed excitement that had astonished Huberte.

"I never imagined that my friend cared a straw for her protégé," Huberte had said to her husband, after Zoë's departure; whereupon Monsieur Papotte, who was decidedly romantic, in spite of his advancing years and proclivity to colds, made reply,

"My dear, who ever supposed that you adored me, and vice versâ? These things are always mysteries."

Throughout her entire life, Zoë never forgot the most trifling circumstances of that

journey. The gradual blending of twilight into dawn, the shifting scenes, the pale gilding of spire and roof by the winter sun, the dappled east, the windy clouds piled above the pine-tops, the brown woods and blue-green hills—all these things were burnt into her memory for ever.

To her dismay she found, on reaching the railway station at nightfall, that there was no conveyance to St. Yves and Roscoff till next day. There was nothing but to sleep in the little hotel close by, and start next morning. This delay pleaded hard for Gabriel.. Again and again the possibility occurred to her that she should relinquish her intention, after all, and that on the morrow, instead of watching alone for Lionel's ship on the Druidesses' Island, she should be

working by Gabriel's side in the dingy little office of the timber merchant.

But inclinations will sometimes do with the most single-minded of us as it will; and when morning broke, the same passionate longing to see Delmar's ship held her a prisoner. She felt like one over whose eyes a glamour has been cast, whose hands and feet seem bound, whose instincts are paralyzed. It was useless for her to fight against her feeble self any longer; she was helpless as a child in the grip of a giant.

The day dawned greyly and coldly, with alternations of icy rain and breaking sky, the weather worsening as the time wore on. Reinforcements of heavy clouds rolled up continually from the west, whilst the wind

no longer blew in gusts and from one quarter only, but, as it seemed, from all. Through wind and rain the lumbering vehicle made irksome way, driver and outside passengers buttoned up to the throat, and blinking against the blinding drops. Zoë, sitting bravely beside the conductor, ventured upon a timid question from time to time. Would the weather be very rough at sea, did he think, and would it be possible to cross over to the Druiddesses' Island? Would ships leave Brest harbour at such a time? and so on, her interlocutor answering uncomfortingly.

At last the little port was reached, and Zoë ran hither and thither in quest of information. Nothing could be dismaler than the aspect of everything. Rain continued to pour down in torrents at intervals,

and the heavens lowered threateningly, whilst interblending sea and sky presented to the vision one vast voluminous surface of lurid grey and green.

The first place to which she had recourse was the shipping-office, for she felt that it would be sheer folly to cross over to the island, if the *Dominateur* were safely harboured in Brest. Were his departure indefinitely delayed she had better return home, she thought, the state of the weather and the prevailing uncomfortableness generally forcing her into a more practical mood.

Her inquiry whether the ship had started was answered in that brief, almost vindictive manner with which business men are apt to speak of unpropitious affairs.

"Yes, as ill luck would have it, she

has," replied the agent, looking up for a moment only. "The weather has suddenly changed, but if not too late, she will put back to harbour. We shall have a telegram in half an hour."

"May I call again?" she asked, fearfully. She felt suddenly overcome with a sense of her own insignificance, and the consequences of the storm to others. All within and without the office was anxiety and commotion. Amid the confusion of voices, her hesitating request was not heard, and she had to repeat it, which she did more tremblingly still.

This time, however, it fell upon a more sympathetic ear, and she was politely told by an underling to call again in half an hour. Then she went to the little inn where she had breakfasted so gaily with

Gabriel on the day of the Fêtes des Morts, and ate and drank drearily. The wind and rain beat against the window panes in fitful gusts; the heavens grew more and more lowering; life had become all at once inexpressibly burdensome and cheerless.

As she sat there, she saw in her mind's eye a bright hearth and a beaming face awaiting her how near, yet how far off! She knew that Gabriel's joy at seeing her back again would be unaffected and deep; that he loved her with a guileless, unsuspecting love; that he was good, and honest, and true. Why did she feel this terrible reluctance to return to him? Why was it life here, and death there?

She leaned over the wood fire in a fit of unconquerable anguish. Yes, she could not lie to herself. The vague hope of seeing

Lionel's ship sail by was dearer to her than the height and depth, and length and breadth of Gabriel's clinging affection. He was, in truth, nothing to her, and the memory of Lionel all in all.

There are moments in life when a feather turns the scale of our future destinies, and a bridge, finer even than that leading to the Mahomedan Paradise, leads from what might have been to what is; and thus it was now. Whilst the distracted girl hesitated between two courses—Duty pulling one way, Love the other—chance decided for her.

In France a beautiful face rules imperially always, and the junior clerk at the shipping office, having watched her enter the inn, now followed her thither, ostensibly for the sake of saving her a wet walk, but

in reality to gratify himself by the sight of those tender blue eyes.

"The ship has started, Mademoiselle," he said; "we have just received the telegram. And I think I heard you asking just outside our office whether any communication is to be made to-day with the Druidesses' Island. Permit me to say that there is a boat putting off at once, not the mail boat, but one from our own office, and dispatched at our own risk. You might perhaps get permission to go, though unless you desire it for most important reasons, I should dissuade you from the enterprise."

Zoë did not hesitate a moment now. Her eyes were feverishly bright, her cheeks glowed. The young man gazed, thinking he had never before seen so stately yet sweet a creature, and making many apolo-

gies, accompanied her to the place of embarkation. But how changed was the aspect of everything! When Zoë and Gabriel had crossed a few months back, only smooth lines of velvety sand and azure sea divided them from the island, so crystalline the waves, so caressingly they lapped the gleaming, shell-strewn shore, that nothing could have seemed more ethereal and fairy-like. Now bright blue waves and lustrous beach had vanished, the sky was hidden; around, above, below, were seething masses of turgid water and dense volumes of yellow foam, threatening, as it seemed, to engulph not only the little port, but the entire promontory. The noise of cataclysmal winds and waters was perhaps more portentous and fear-inspiring than the sight, though

that might well have inspired dread in a braver heart than Zoë's.

Far as the eye could reach, stretched the serried array of breakers, now advancing, now retiring, interminable, impenetrable—a deadly host throwing itself against the battlements of the solid world, as if to invade and destroy. The wildness of the storm only intensified her purpose. The thought flashed across her mind that perhaps it were better to perish now than pledge herself to promises she could not keep. But there was no particular danger at present, the boatmen said; they might not get back, but they were pretty sure to get there, and if she chose to run all risks, she was welcome to a seat.

The rude populations of these fishing

colonies are accustomed to heroism and endurance in their women; it does not strike them as odd that where men are found women are to be found also; and, had the need arisen, they would have asked Zoë to lend a hand with the ropes as naturally as possible. She had put a huge oilskin cloak over her soft grey travelling mantle, and with the hood drawn about her head, was almost as well protected as her companions.

Once well out of the harbour's mouth, the perilous part of their journey was past, and after three hours' wrestling with winds and waves, the little bark was hauled ashore, everyone bruised and battered against the boat's sides, the sailors flushed and panting with exertion. The fatigues of that rude voyage gave Zoë what she had not ex-

perienced since starting on her travels several days ago, namely, a long, unbroken, child-like sleep.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon when she arrived at the little inn opposite the landing-place, and, urged by the landlady, lay down on the bed to rest.

"After a journey like the one you have just taken," she said, "we are always cold as ice and hot as fire. There is a demon in us, and an angel too, and the only way to escape the first is to drink a hot tisane, and get between the blankets."

So she obeyed, and in five minutes' time was slumbering peacefully as a child. Her forces, mentally and bodily, were alike spent. At nightfall, her hostess found her still asleep, and placing some food and wine on the table, retired as gently as she had

come. Even the clatter of her sabots, and the shifting light, did not arouse the weary girl, still less the roar of wind and sea outside. There was a good deal of movement in the house, as is always the case at such times, anxious mariners coming in and out, messengers and inquirers from all parts of the island, voices underneath, footsteps above; amid all these noises Zoë slept as serenely as if she were in her quiet little room at St. Yves, where not a sound broke the stillness, from the ringing of the Angelus till the chiming for Matins.



CHAPTER VI.

"LE VOILÀ!"

SHE was suddenly aroused by an indescribable confusion in the house, and, hastily descending, found the little kitchen crowded and uproarious. Something had happened, she knew not what, and all were too busy to pay any heed to her trembling inquiries.

"*Le Dominateur! Le Dominateur!*" were the first words she caught, and listening keenly, she gradually gathered that the ship was in dire straits, and that efforts were

being made to fetch off the crew. Thus much poor Zoë learned, now hearkening to one, now to another, growing every moment more intensely anxious on Delmar's behalf. If the ship were in jeopardy, then so was his dear life, and surely she could do something on his behalf!

Finding no one ready to answer her importunities, she made difficult way to the little yard in front of the house, from which a winding path led to the sea-shore. All was pitchy dark, save for the beacon-lights far a-head, and the twinkling lanterns borne hither and thither along the quay. There were trampling feet and hurrying voices close under her eyes, but she could distinguish nothing, and bruised and blinded by the wind and rain, was at length driven back to the house.

Again she ventured forth, and, by a tremendous effort, continued to make head against the storm. Only a few hundred yards divided her from the gendarmerie station, marked by its coloured lamps, but it seemed miles as she moved forward inch by inch, now buffeted by a violent gust, now fiercely pelted by the rain. The mingled uproar of winds, waters, and human voices made her brain giddy, and more than once she slipped and fell, but she persisted.

One thought only filled her mind then. She had money with her—her little all—and perhaps that might be the means of saving him. It might be wrong to single out one precious life among so many in peril. Yet she must make an effort on his behalf. At the cost of all her worldly

possessions—of her life, were it necessary—the effort should be made.

She tried to calm herself as she approached the station, and to put her proposition into reasonable shape. But who could listen, who could compassionate at such an hour? Her pathetic treble fell utterly unheeded on the ears of the rough men about her.

A queen could not have singled out the life of her first-born son for rescue then, were it with her crown jewels as a guerdon.

A little removed from the gendarmerie were knots of spectators—men, women, and children all straining their eyes in the direction of the ship, her lights burning fitfully across the eddying waste of waters. Excepting for the white lines of foam distinguishable on the nearer breakers, all was

pitchy black—sky, and sea, and distant island rocks. These bystanders were accustomed to storms and shipwrecks, and stood unheedingly in the wind and rain, in order to behold a spectacle to which they were but too well accustomed. The vessel struggling yonder with wind and waters might go down, and in former days, great would have been the exultation of their fierce ancestors over the spoil. But now they watched with a kinder, more humane feeling, and were ready to lend a helping hand to fellow-sufferers in distress. Zoë accosted the first little group in trembling accents.

Were they bringing the passengers off the ship? she said. Would no one among the fishermen venture to the rescue on his own account for the sake of a large reward? There was a relation of her own on board, she

said, and anyone who brought him safely to shore should have a thousand francs. They could see the money if they liked, and she drew out a pocket-book rather wildly. She was beside herself with suspense. No one spoke, but two of the men elbowed her rather ominously, and had it not been for friendly intervention she might have rued her indiscretion.

"Come with me," said a master boatswain, rather gruffly, leading the way to a little hut near the gendarmerie. "You should not show your money at such a time. These are not all our own people, and might do you an ill turn."

"Oh!" Zoë cried. "Surely what I ask is not unreasonable. If only one more effort could be made on my behalf."

"We know best," answered the man,

shaking his head. "The boats are sent out, and the crew will be brought off safe and sound, we hope. No, young lady. There is nothing for you to do but go home and say your prayers."

"Hear me," she said, catching hold of the rough hand and clinging to him. "I have, as I say, money, and my only relation is on board the *Dominateur*. It is surely doing no harm to offer a reward to anyone who shall bring him on shore. These fishermen are brave, I know, but they are also poor. Perhaps money might tempt them even to deeds of greater daring——"

"I tell you the orders are given, and nothing and nobody can alter them," said her interlocutor, who had democratic ideas, and felt in duty bound to check the impetuosity of this delicately-bred girl—the slender

white fingers laid on his arm repulsed him though he had a kindly heart. He softened, however, so far as to bid her keep up her courage and wait indoors with his women-folk if she liked—his wife and daughter were up and stirring, and she would be on the spot when the boats came back.

"They will dry your clothes," he added. "Come with me. I will look out for your kinsman, and bring him to you if indeed he is there."

It had suddenly dawned upon him that, strongly as he disapproved of soft-voiced ladies in the midst of such scenes, his women-folks, who toiled all day like men, might benefit by her generosity on a small scale as much as she benefited by their ministrations. So leading the way to a small room at the back of the boat-house, he commended her to

their care, promising to look out for the Englishman among the rescued.

There was a bright little wood fire crackling on the hearth, and Zoë, taking off her wet cloak, sat down overcome by fatigue and exhaustion. She had spent her forces in that brief encounter with the storm, and now passively watched and waited whilst the fateful minutes crept by, crushed by a sense of feebleness. Had she but been born a man, what should have hindered her from at least making an effort on Lionel's behalf? As it was, she could only sit by and let Fate do with him as it would.

The storm raged unabatedly without, and the turmoil by the shore increased, but burying her face in her cloak, she tried not to listen. All at once a shout made itself heard above the winds and waves, a cry

that made her start to her feet with new energy. For a moment she stood on the threshold to make quite sure that it was so, her heart beating wildly. Yes, she had heard aright. The boats were coming back.

The cry of "The boats, the boats!" ran from mouth to mouth, now caught up in one direction, now in another, as if the heart indeed of the united population leaped up in thankfulness, and every man, woman, and child in the place felt the transports of the deliverer.

Only a little space divided her from the shore, yet how far it seemed in the teeth of that terrible wind and blinding rain! Again and again she tried to reach the excited crowd by the shore, but was driven back. She saw the flickering lights and heard the cries of the

crowd dragging in the boats, but stood still like one in a nightmare transfixed to the spot. All her powers of volition and movement seemed gone, and at last she sank on to a stone bench by the door, the time passing she knew not how. There was a Providence in these things, and perhaps Delmar might be the only one these brave men could not save! As her anxiety increased, the two women keeping her company tried to give her rough cheer. They were admirable specimens of the class called Druidesses, strong and hardy as men, curt in speech, but ready for any emergency, and always alive to material interest. Emboldened by their sympathy, Zoë spoke out more freely than she had dared to do to the man. If all the crew had not been brought off, and her friend was among the

number, surely some one would venture out in a boat for a large sum of money!—for a very large sum of money should be his who brought this Englishman to her alive or dead.

The women pricked up their ears, and asked more particularly as to the colour of his hair, the shape of his features, and so on. They were poor enough, Heaven knew, they said, and what man could do they could also. Then the mother glanced at the daughter significantly. She was not as yet betrothed, and men looked for rich wives in the island. Here might be an occasion to dower her worthily of the richest! At least, they could but try for the prize, and what a triumph if obtained—not in the way of honour and glory—the Druidesses were eminently practical, and

quite above sentiment and romance. But the triumph was one that might be realised all their lives in the shape of added well-being and credit.

Such was the telegraphic communication that passed between the two, Zoë continuing her description all the time. Whatever details as to Delmar's physiognomy and characteristics that occurred to her she gave unfalteringly, her listeners not missing a syllable. When she had done they confabulated together, and retired. A long interval of suspense followed, Zoë sitting alone like one in a dream. The joy and the hope had almost died out of her heart. Surely he could not be there, he was lost! Day was now dawning, and what meantime happened she did not clearly understand. She only knew that from a

desolation and terror unspeakable she was aroused by the flooding of the cabin, with sudden light, and the appearance of two dark, sharply outlined figures in the doorway.

It was the "Druidess" and daughter, in dripping garments, hardly distinguishable from those worn by men of their craft. Greeting Zoë with a shout of triumph, each gave her a hearty embrace, then making way for another figure following after them, they said, simply—

"Le voilà."

CHAPTER VII.

AT PRAYER WITH THE DRUIDESSES.

NEXT day was Sunday, bringing with it a gradual calming down of winds and waves after the storm. The little town, on the contrary, which had been alive all night, grew more and more turbulent as the hours wore on, Sunday on the Druidesses' Island being given up partly to gossip and worldly enjoyment, and partly to prayer. Long before the bells were chiming for mass, crowds thronged the streets, the men in sober, Andalusian-like costumes of black,

veritable *sombreros* on their heads, and to complete the resemblance, splendid violet and purple sashes round their waists; the women statelier still, in creamy white cashmere hoods all of one pattern, black gowns mediævally cut, and exquisite white linen, seen nowhere out of this spot and Rembrandt's pictures. The background to this animated yet solemn population was made up of yellow ochre walls, blue black rocks, and sea, and sky, shimmering from the deepest purple to the delicatest turquoise. Such was the picture Zoë looked upon when, after a snatch of late sleep, she awoke and threw up her casement that glittering spring morning. For a moment only she gazed, drinking in the fresh, briny gusts, then, with a fluttering of the heart, turned away.

She sat down with folded hands beside the table, all the events of the last two days crowding through her mind—the fateful journey to Les Ponts, the unexpected tidings, the danger, the rescue!

Hitherto she had felt almost like a passive thing in the hands of circumstances, but now had come the time to think and act. Three hours at least must elapse before the little mail-boat arrived from the opposite shore, and till then she was hopelessly imprisoned on the island with Delmar. Escape was impossible. Neither for love nor money could anyone procure a boat this Sunday morning, on one day in the week even worldly advantage being set aside for worship and amusement.

But how to avoid a tête-à-tête interview, how to avoid explanations? Only a few

merest phrases of congratulation and welcome had passed between them during that strange encounter a few hours before. Delmar was shivering with cold and exposure, and could hardly articulate even the word or two of mingled pleasure and surprise with which he had greeted her. Then, his forces being spent, he gave himself into the hands of the "Druidesses," who were but too well skilled in the art of restoring half-drowned men. Such occurrences were common enough in those parts, and promising Zoë that he should have every possible care and attention, they had carried him off to bed.

He was doubtless sleeping, she thought, as she glanced across to the boatman's house, only a few hundred yards from the inn. He might perhaps sleep on for hours, and

there was just a possibility of escaping this dreaded meeting after all. She would put on her bonnet and cloak, and go to church. There at least she should have an hour and a half of blessed quiet and security.

Very demurely she made the best of her travelling toilette, and set out, not venturing to look behind or before, walking with downcast eyes, like a nun.

The church was small, but crowded in every part, the black-robed, white-hooded women sitting on one side, the men on the other, their blue waist sashes and the bright blue roof studded with gold stars, after the manner of these parts, relieving the severity of the picture. By-and-by, came two priests in yellow and scarlet, adding a flame of colour as the service began, to Zoë's thinking, the most solemn she

had ever witnessed. There was an expression of intense devotion and pathos on these rough, weather-beaten faces, especially of the women. These sisters of hers, with their Herculean strength, whose duty was summed up in two words, toil and child-bearing, seemed enviable to Zoë as she watched their calm faces, herself torn by a thousand inquietudes. They at least knew what the sunrising would bring forth, they at least woke up and lay down with the consciousness of accomplishing their destinies, namely, giving birth to a hardy race and toiling for daily bread. "But what am I?" she asked, with wild thoughts hurrying through her brain. "Who is not wiser, calmer, happier than I?"

In some such fashion as this she pondered whilst the priests automatically got

through the prayers and sermon, little in the way of music or ceremonial relieving the service. Nothing could be colder, less animated, but anyone could see how much this religious routine meant to the passive listeners. It was a part of their existence, and like their craft and costume, unchanged throughout generations, most likely not to be changed for generations to come. Change, indeed, was the one thing they did not want on the Druidesses' Island.

When all was over, the crowd of churchgoers broke out into little clusters, gossiping, smoking, idling, Zoë never once looking back, and, as if pursued by a mortal foe, hastened across the island, not halting till she had reached a solitary little creek on the other side. There were patches of vegetation here and there above the yellow

walls, glorious little bits of emerald pricking the gold leeward, and before, one wide expanse of scintillating blue sea and brown island rocks.

Here she sat pondering for awhile, then, rising, bathed her face in the cool, clear water of the creek. She must calm herself before the hour of meeting.

She retraced her way very slowly, growing white and timid as she neared the town. Once or twice she dropped on to a rude stone block by the roadside, and covered her face with her hands, saying that it could not be. She must hide herself from Delmar, at least, for the present. By-and-by, perhaps, she would see him.

Yet why this timidity and shrinking? What had she done to make her quail before this encounter? She felt conscious of

nothing to conceal. If anyone had reason to dread an interview it was surely he. She must, she would hide these foolish tremors.

As she drew near the little inn, she caught sight of Delmar watching from an open window. He recognised her at once, and hastened out of the house. There was no time for reflection. In a minute he was by her side, beginning a conversation she knew not how.

"The mail-boat will be waiting—I must go at once, please," were the first words she was conscious of uttering, and seeing her agitation, he yielded without a demur. Talking lightly of common things, he led her down to the shore, where, true enough, the little bark was being got ready for immediate departure.

A few minutes remained to them, and standing arm-in-arm, a little apart from the crowd, he tried to put her at her ease. Poor Zoë! how she hated those cruel blushes and tremors which would not be mastered, do what she could! She was even aware of hot tears glistening on her veil, and felt grateful to him for keeping his eyes fixed on the busy group before them.

"Come," he said, between raillery and reproach, "have you not a word for an old friend, Zoë? Are we to part thus, after a long separation? I have a thousand questions to ask you—first and foremost, what brought you here so fortuitously?"

All this was uttered as naturally and easily, Zoë thought, as when he had proposed a country ramble in the old days,

and she resented a self-control which appeared to her very much like want of heart. Not for worlds should he ever learn the truth concerning this particular, and her very indignation came to the rescue. She answered as calmly as himself,

"I have no time to explain now."

He noted the sudden rearing of the fair head, and the coldness of the sweet voice, also an unexpected recovering of self-possession.

His next query was put almost with humility,

"But now that I am so near, you will at least permit me to pay you and my old friend Gabriel a visit." He hesitated a little, then boldly added—"For I was at Les Ponts a few days ago. I saw Huberte, and she gave me news of you."

Zoë dropped her eyes, utterly dumbfounded at this request.

"May I come to-morrow?" he added, anxious to settle the matter without further parley.

What could she do but murmur an incoherent assent? Then again she recovered herself, and said, with a skilful poise of the voice that sounded very like calm,

"Gabriel will indeed be pleased to see you, for you are his only friend."

"Except yourself," Delmar said again, in a tone of feigned raillery.

"Yes, but I cannot be brother and sister too," Zoë answered, simply and sadly, just then her heart yearning to her unhappy friend and companion of so many months. "He is much too lonely. That is why I am glad to leave this place."

"Then I may come?" Delmar reiterated, put, he hardly knew why, into a sudden mood of exhilaration.

"Of course, if you wish it," she replied, looking straight before her.

"I expect to be kept here several days till the vessel can proceed on her way, and what could I do alone on this barren little island?" he exclaimed, pretending to look dismal. "I do not, in the least, know how I shall get through the next twenty-four hours. Why, indeed, should I not return with you now instead of to-morrow?"

He looked at her for her reply, which was given in the negative without hesitation. Then the boatman begged her to enter; he helped her to her seat, and stood smiling and nodding till the little bark had got far out to sea. Zoë leaned back, look-

ing into the deep blue water abstractedly. Was she pleased or sorry at the permission she had just granted? Her face did not say.

CHAPTER VIII.

CONFIDENCES.

ON entering the little parlour, Zoë found it silent and deserted, Gabriel having set forth early in the day on a pedestrian excursion, and not being expected back till nightfall. She had, therefore, a quiet hour or two for reflection before the somewhat difficult interview to follow. All she need not disclose, but something he must know, and what to tell, what to conceal? Why, oh, why, she asked herself, had she yielded to her wild impulses, when duty and maidenly reserve beckoned the other way?

She found, after much vain speculation and pondering, that these helped nothing, and that chance must shape her conduct as it would when the moment for action came. And chance came to her aid, for, on finding her so unexpectedly in the familiar place, Gabriel's joy was too lively to be easily overcome by other feelings.

"You went for a week, and you are here on the fourth day," he said, holding her hands and looking as if they met after years of absence. "This is, indeed, a happy surprise! The days seemed too long without you."

Then they sat down opposite each other, she opening up the explanation rather timidly.

"I accomplished all my business at Les Ponts in a few hours, and I gave up the

idea of going to Aunt Félicité's. Something wholly unexpected has happened," she added, looking down and fingering her watch-chain with ill-concealed nervousness. "I have seen my cousin Lionel. He is coming here to-morrow."

For a moment he did not speak. Infected by her embarrassment, he murmured a meaningless word or two, and she continued,

"Gabriel, you always say that you owe me your life, and perhaps I was serviceable to you once. Will you repay it now by granting a request I am about to ask?"

Perhaps this was a cowardly way of getting out of her difficulty, but, at least, it seemed the only one practicable. He promised at once.

"Some time or other I will explain everything," she went on, "but not yet. I have not arrived straight from Les Ponts, but from the Druidesses' Island. I cannot tell you now why I went. It was there I met Lionel. He will explain the rest."

Thereupon she broke off with a burst of tears, and said—

"You must also tell him all that has happened since he went away. Tell him of our flight from L'Oisilière, and of the evil report that has followed us here. Do not conceal anything."

"You will surely see your cousin also?"

"Perhaps—I do not know. His visit is to you," she answered, growing more and more agitated. "But you can understand how much there is that you two must talk

of alone. I would rather not see Lionel again. If I had anywhere to go to I would go. But I have not, so here I must stay." And saying that, she looked so utterly wretched that Gabriel felt bound to try to offer a word of comfort.

"You are weary," he said, soothingly. "When to-morrow comes, and you have rested, you will feel differently about it. I will do as you wish, and tell Delmar exactly what has occurred from the beginning. Do not look so grieved. He can but understand."

"He will never be able to understand," she said. Then, making a great effort to speak calmly, she went on, feeling then, in the intensity of her loneliness and sorrow, as if indeed it were a brother to whom she

was now speaking, and as if on his brotherly affection and confidence she could rely in this her hour of trouble. "Dear Gabriel, you know that in my heart of hearts I have never reproached you for asking me to come here with you. We felt drawn to each other by something more than common friendship, and there was the past as a bond between us! I had brought shame on myself in doing service to you. Shall I tell you why I so easily consented to do what you asked me, when I ought not to have dreamed of it for a moment? And if you had lived in the world, or had ever known what it is to have a sister, you could understand. I was growing desperate—that is the word. The monotony and forced idleness of the life at L'Oisilière—and dear Aunt Félicité's manuscripts—" here she

smiled through her tears—"were becoming intolerable. I could not stay there, but I hardly cared what became of me, so long as I went away. I felt, at least, that I should be of some use to you——"

"Then why reproach yourself?" said the young man, very earnestly. "You have been, not a sister, but an angel to me. Is there no consolation in the thought?"

She shook her head with the same pensive smile.

"You are not a woman. You do not know what it is to have to bear such looks as Madame Hervé and her daughter gave me the other day. And you also have incurred blame through me. No, Gabriel, call me your evil genius rather than your guardian angel, since I have done you far more harm than good. It will become clear as day-

light to you by-and-by. You, too, perhaps, may some day despise me with the rest."

"Dear Zoë," he reasoned, with a pained look, and with a slight assumption of authority, "you speak bitterly without occasion. You must know that those who love you, and understand your motives—myself most of all, and I may say, I am sure, your cousin Lionel—will always honour you above all other women——"

"Ah!" she cried, passionately, "you cannot tell what Lionel will think. We are all strangers to each other!"

"That is a hard speech."

"But it is true. What do you and I know of Lionel's secret thoughts, or of each other's? Were you to read mine sometimes, you would think very differently of me; and perhaps, were I to read yours, I should

doubtless find you quite another person from the one I know! But what does it matter what Lionel thinks? After to-morrow we shall each go our own ways, and most probably never meet again so long as we live. Tell him everything."

Then she gave him her hand without a word, and the two separated till the morning, each to prepare for it as best they could. But for Zoë's extraordinary agitation, Gabriel would have felt unmixed pleasure in the thought of meeting his friend, whilst her feeling was of sheer dread, and for hours she lay awake pondering as to the possibility of escape. But none was to be had; for ten days more she was hopelessly pledged to the counting-house, and meantime Delmar was within a few hours' journey! He might come, not once, but a dozen times, and how

could she forbid him? The ordeal must be gone through, no matter at what cost.

Next morning broke fair and calm. There was not the faintest chance of a storm keeping Delmar weather-bound to his island, Zoë thought, as she opened her casement. But he could not arrive till the afternoon, and meantime intervened long hours of work as a consolation and restorer.

Oh! blessed, thrice blessed Toil! What poet hath fittingly hymned thee, what priest consecrated, what physician acknowledged? Yet thou art often the only God-like thing in a human life, the sanctifier of nations, balm and healing of weary human hearts! For it is not only an unimagined sunset, or the terrors of a storm, or the witcheries of music and song that lift us out of ourselves and our petty griefs. Toil also is a wonder-

working spell, wrapping us body and mind in a blessed insensibility, rocking us to a kind of delicious waking sleep, from which we arise invigorated and refreshed.

CHAPTER IX.

THREE FRIENDS.

TRUE to his word, Delmar appeared the next afternoon, the two men meeting each other half way. Lionel, as became the elder, took the initiative in conversation.

"Come," he said, surveying his friend's civilian's dress with evident satisfaction, "now I can talk to you as an equal; now I can, indeed, regard you as a man and a brother."

"And what was I before in your eyes?" asked the other, by no means affronted.

"I had better not say; at least, not yet," Delmar answered, again smiling. "I should not, perhaps, find the name visionary hard enough. But you are healed, you are sane, and I congratulate you, my friend, from the bottom of my heart."

"Yet I am not sure that there is much matter for congratulation," said the young man, sadly. "I have hardly gained as much as I have lost. Outward and inward peace, an ardent belief in what, at least, was higher and better than myself, a career that might appear circumscribed to the world, but was yet capable of indefinite enlargement. All these I had. I was something. I am nothing."

Delmar looked at his friend in astonishment. Had this humble speech dropped from the lips of the once self-congratulatory,

even arrogant Father Gabriel? He gazed narrowly, and marked the change that had come over his friend's physiognomy and general appearance since they last met; the pale cheeks, the anxious lips, the drawn down muscles, the reduced limbs. What was this transformation of which Zoë had not spoken? What new ordeal was he going through?

"My dear friend," he said, putting a friendly hand on his shoulder, "you are suffering, and Zoë did not tell me."

"Do not reproach her; she does not know all," replied the other, eagerly. "She cannot understand. You see," he continued, as they sat down on a wayside seat, preparing for a long, leisurely talk, "were I perpetually to pour out my plaints to her, it would look like ingratitude or weariness

of the life we are leading together, the new existence to which she has awakened me. I am born into a new world, my friend, since last we met, and of mere happiness I have more than my share. But happiness is not all that I want; it cannot make me whole again."

He sighed and added,

"Zoë is not framed, either by temperament or natural disposition, to be in sympathy with me. She cannot comprehend the spiritual needs of those who want alike her fine instincts and transparent goodness; nor, perhaps, can you, for though I will not say that you are devoid of these virtues, with you I think cynicism takes the place of your cousin's freedom from religious conflicts."

"Nay, perhaps if you go to the root of

the matter, you would find that both of us say our prayers as promptly as the most orthodox creeds people going," Delmar said, a little reproachfully. "But that is no matter. Go on."

"Put yourself in my place, then, and you will realise the blank of which I speak. I had once all that an enlightened——"

"Ah! do not so misuse that word, my dear friend. Say aspiring or devout, but not enlightened, for heaven's sake!"

"A spiritual-minded human being, then, could desire," the young man continued. "I was satisfied with my destiny as one of the purest and best-appointed by God to His creatures. Whatever I might do, that primary fact could not be altered. There was the Church, the most complete—in fact, the only all-embracing divine institu-

tion on earth, and I, its appointed servant, by virtue of such ministration, placed on a higher level than my fellows. The future was assured to me—a future humble, it might be, yet calm, smooth, devoted to intellectual work and heavenly contemplation. All else seemed poor and indifferent by comparison, and my fellow-creatures—ay, even Zoë and yourself, my friend, considered logically from that stand-point—were hardly less than contemptible."

"I am much obliged to you, I am sure," Delmar said, laughing.

"But see from what height I have fallen!" resumed Gabriel. "All is lost now—the belief in self, the serenity, the tranquil looking forward! I find no place in this new world to which you and Zoë have summoned me; transported to another

planet, I should hardly find myself more of a stranger. My learning is antiquated and useless, my experiences of life rather a millstone round my neck than a staff to lean on, my conclusions at fault upon everything. Ask Zoë if this is not true. She is a woman, and not better instructed, I suppose, than the rest of her lay-sisters; but how infinitely does she soar above me in the practical knowledge that avails human beings obliged to struggle for existence—how much more at home is she in the common affairs of life!"

"This little earth of ours is so crowded that many a worldling, cast anew upon his resources, feels exactly as you do," Delmar said, encouragingly. "Take heart; you are skilled in the ancient tongues and in philosophy. There is surely a field for such

acquirements as these in the New World, if not in the old."

"I know not," answered the young man, still despondent. "This I know, that Zoë has hitherto far surpassed me in whatever matters we have undertaken. The work she finds easy, nay, pleasant, is intolerable to me, though I have never told her so. I would not unnecessarily vex her for worlds."

"But you are about to make an experiment. You will find more congenial occupation in a large country like America."

Gabriel was silent, and Delmar added, anxious to divert the conversation into another channel—

"Does not Zoë think so? Is she not pleased at the prospect?"

The other shook his head doubtfully.

"Indeed, I cannot tell. Sometimes I think so, but we seldom talk of such matters. She loses heart and patience too when I cannot take things as they come—that is her way of putting it. But I hope she will see you."

"I hope so," Delmar replied, drily. "Why should she not?" He did not add—"She must see me." But Gabriel read the thought in his face.

"Of course she cannot refuse, and I should be glad for you to talk together about the future. Perhaps she will be less reserved with you than with me."

Delmar grew more and more perplexed. Every word the young man uttered about Zoë was dark to him, and was fast setting at naught the convictions with which he had started. He hesitated, however, before

putting the downright question on his lips. At last, seeing Gabriel in no mind to open a way, he asked, simply,

"Is she happy?"

"Is a woman ever happy? You should know best," answered Gabriel, with an expression of inward dissatisfaction. "Some days she is sunshine itself, and the world does not seem large enough to hold her buoyant thoughts; at others, she is silent, and sad, and cold. But let us not stay here any longer. She will begin to expect our return."

There was yet another question on Delmar's lips. Should he learn for once and for all the nature of this strange union between his kinswoman and his friend? Were it not better that he should know now? He pondered the matter over, and finally

decided to wait. By Zoë's lips, if any at all, should her secret of secrets be disclosed, and he felt as if her looks would answer for her without words. Meantime Gabriel had fallen into a wholly different train of thought, and suddenly stooping to pluck a wayside flower, contemplated it for a moment, standing still beside his companion.

"See," he said, with a burst of sudden animation, "this is the kind of monitor I have ever before me! A field flower, a shell on the sands, the tiny insect humming in my ears, proclaim the disparity between my old life and the new, the falseness of the one, the richness of the other! The humblest thing in nature, as well as the stars shining so majestically above, are as completely mysterious to me as to the veriest savage. You call me learned, and so in a

certain narrow sense I am; but why did not the teachers of my youth unravel these mysteries, and open my mind to the marvels and perfections of the natural world? What avail the treasures of scholasticism, the lore of philosophers and theologians, without a knowledge of the universe, or, at least, in so far as knowledge is attainable by the human mind? Alas! my friend, I find myself as a grown-up child, ashamed of his ignorance, yet too old to go to school!"

"There you, at least, are not alone," Delmar said, with a smile. "How many more men find themselves at twenty-five compelled to unlearn the so-called instruction of their youth? Good Heavens! there is time enough for you to become anything you want—an observer of the heavens, a pryer

into the mysteries of the under-world, in other words, a geologist, or a poet—if it please you!"

He spoke jestingly, but the other replied, with deep seriousness,

"A poet! You do not know what you say! Can a man re-fashion his mind, teach himself how to see and to think? A poet, indeed! Alas! Poetry is not a plant that can flourish within the precincts of the monastery. On the pure images the poets have created for us, imagination is not there trained to dwell. But do not for a moment suppose that I see no good in the calling I have cast off as an unsuitable garment."

"I am sure your present one must be much more to your taste, as it is in harmony with the age in which you live," Delmar answered, surveying his friend from

head to foot. "Your appearance in former days was as incongruous in my eyes as that of a Red Indian in the streets of New York."

"Always the scoffer!" rejoined the other, with a gesture of disapproval. "Can you not be in earnest upon a single topic under the sun? But let me go on. As I say, I am grateful for much in my past life, to those good men who taught and nurtured me, to the Church of which I was a fosterling, and I deplore every day that I should be perforce at enmity with her now. Were it otherwise, I should be what I sometimes, though not in all seriousness, call yourself, a cynic, or little better."

"Answer me one question," Delmar said, laying his hand on Gabriel's arm, and stopping for a moment to look searchingly into his face. "You would not undo the past?

You acknowledge your debt to those who opened your eyes and put you in the right path ?"

"Yes, indeed. But a slave does not at first know how to use his liberty, and may perhaps miss even the whip and the chain!"

They had now arrived at their destination, and Gabriel turned the door-handle. Delmar flushed nervously, but there was no need, Zoë was not there.

CHAPTER X.

THE BISHOP'S GOLDEN CROSS.

WHEN a Bishop of the Holy See crosses an ecclesiastical threshold outside his diocese, he immediately hides under his vest the golden cross, symbol of his jurisdiction, nor does he again expose it to view till he enters his spiritual dominions.

This transient hiding of the bishop's golden cross may be compared to the blush of a woman which belongs to her lover. No sooner does she quit neutral territory, and find

herself within precincts over which she holds supreme sway, than the glorious signal is held out. There is no more concealment. She is proud to show that she is sovereign.

Gabriel had noted the symbolic act in former days many a time, and was bitterly reminded of it now. Just as the mightiest bishop may bring as much of his pomp as he chooses within the humble Franciscan, yet, by virtue of that hidden golden cross, is here nothing, so may a woman in leaving that tell-tale blush behind, proclaim that she is no longer a queen, holding joyous court. And, thus was it with Zoë now. She was not a woman to flinch from a hard encounter. She knew that she could not send Delmar away without seeing him,

much as she might wish it, and forced herself by a desperate effort into a simulated calm. She was coldly gracious, self-possessed, almost gay.

But the blush betrayed her. From the first moment Gabriel saw it all, and indeed eyes less keen might have perceived how it stood with her. She could no more help that tell-tale rosiness than the shape of her brow, or the inches of her stature.

The two men had waited long for her appearance. Tea was spread. The fire crackled cheerily on the hearth. Why did she keep them waiting? They tried to maintain a conversation without reference to her.

At last, on a sudden, the door had opened, and there she stood, dressed in her every-day gown, yet, to Delmar's eyes, with seduc-

tive unusualness and piquancy. Truth to tell, Zoë had clothed herself something after the fashion of those parts, and that dress of richest, warmest, most delicious blue, was simply made of the home-spun cloth of the district, purchased by her some Saturday afternoon at the cloth-market, when the square in front of the Cathedral literally blazed with the scarlet, crimson, blue, and yellow piles heaped up on every side. Then she had taken to the exquisitely-cut linen stomacher and sleeves of the peasant girls, which admirably became the rest of her costume.

To Delmar's thinking she had never looked half so fair.

"This is delightful!" he said, surveying alternately the little drawing-room and its mistress. "And Zoë has her piano, too—

that fetish without which no woman can be kept in good temper. You must play to me. Recollect I have never heard you strike a chord even."

"I think we never talked of music. I did not know that you cared about it," she answered, bending down over her tea-cups.

"And this is the first time you have ever played hostess to me!" he continued, as he received the cup from her hand. His animation kindled hers. Do what she would, she could but follow whither he chose to lead.

"Ah! I had forgotten. We feasted together many a time in the country. But it was your part to cater then, mine to enjoy the good things provided for me. Those were banquets indeed!"

"Do you remember our picnic by the sea?" he asked. "The yellow corn-fields above the hanging rocks, the blue above, the blue beneath, and not a creature in sight but us two! That was the best day of all."

She smiled incredulously. What an absurd question to ask if she remembered it, that smile said. As if there were some things ever to be forgotten!

"But let us make the best of our time," she said, looking from him to Gabriel. "We have only a few hours to be together, and there is so much for you to tell us. Where have you been these long months? What have you been doing? And those wonderful archæological studies—how have they progressed? We want to hear everything."

"All in good time. And you two must

also be more communicative. As yet all is mysterious to me. How came you here, to the uttermost end of the world, as it seems to me? And what is this emigration plan of which Huberte told me? I am perfectly in the dark."

Zoë looked at Gabriel questioningly, and with some discontent. She had hoped that these explanations were already made. Then, seeing the common disinclination to personal talk, and her colour coming and going, Delmar led the conversation into safer channels. Soon all three were talking brightly of ordinary topics, as in the old days—Zoë sparkling and inspiring; Delmar cool and learned; Gabriel combative and fiery. As the evening wore on, talk became more animated still. The three friends were together for the last

time for years, the morrow's separation might be for ever, but the exultation in the moment banished looking forward.

Delmar, except for an occasional look of age and care, was exactly his old self. Gabriel forgot his inner conflicts; even Zoë grew gay, as in former days. When, at a late hour, she brought out food and wine, they drank to each other almost merrily. The wine was of feeble quality, the viands of Spartan simplicity, all three had a cankering care within, yet the little celebration wore the look of a banquet.

Gabriel glanced from time to time at Zoë wonderingly. Never had he seemed to understand her so little as now. Ah! he thought, why is it that she is quiet and dreamy and pensive when we are alone? that these bright sallies, these happy

touches, these playful fancies are not for me? She appears a wholly different being now that Delmar is by. It is the magnetism of his presence, his inspiration, which have so changed her for the time. And none could be more keenly alive to the transformation than Zoë herself. She knew that her eyes were bright, her cheeks glowing, her voice musical with joy. Yet, she asked herself, joy in what? The future stretching before her seemed a wilderness.

Long after she had retired the two men sat up talking, but even when they separated past midnight, the mystery of which Delmar's mind was full had not been solved. He had said to himself a hundred times that nothing could be easier than the putting of the question on his lips; yet

when it came to deeds, he quailed. Zoë's proud looks, so fresh in his memory, abashed him. He could not, he would not believe what Huberte's looks rather than words had suggested to him. This romantic attachment between the pair was mere brotherly and sisterly after all.

Next morning, on entering the little parlour for breakfast, he found Zoë alone. She was standing by the open window feeding a multitude of tame sparrows that fluttered about, almost too bold to be frightened by the appearance of a stranger.

"Hush!" she whispered, not turning round to answer his good morning. "Be very gentle, please. One of the little things will perch on my shoulder, if you

make no noise. Ah! intruder, you have driven them away!"

"They will come back again," Delmar said, standing beside her, suddenly grown as uneasy as herself. She glanced round to see if Gabriel were not coming, but the house was quite quiet, he had not yet come back from his early stroll. They were alone then. She must hear him at last.

It was a sweet spring morning, with pink buds bursting on the trees, and birds delightedly glancing in the warm sunshine. Zoë herself looked a part of the spring, so exquisitely fair the outlines of her sweet face, so clear the blue eyes, so full of colour the abundant hair.

A few minutes passed thus, she trembling,

with eyes averted, he no less troubled, but master of himself. There was not a minute to be lost. The words came out without choosing, as best they might.

"Zoë," he said, and that was all, "I crossed the sea this time to tell you that I am free—to ask you to be my wife."

"I have promised Gabriel never to leave him," she answered. As he looked on her pale, unreadable features, his own grew hard and cold. It was not her heart that had spoken, nor her innermost self, but the words were uttered, and none followed to soften or make clear.

For a minute or two they waited, the little sparrows twittering outside the window, no other noise breaking the stillness; then she moved to the breakfast-table, saying,

"Let us not wait any longer for Gabriel. In a quarter of an hour you will have to go."

CHAPTER XI.

THE WAYSIDE CALVARY.

HALF an hour later, Zoë and Gabriel were sitting side by side in the timber merchant's office, as if nothing had happened. Zoë went through her day's routine with collectedness, ate and drank when the meal-times came, behaved, indeed, precisely as before that momentous journey of a few days ago. She was kind, cheerful, nay, sympathetic to him; but the blush, the sparkle, the unspeakable something of yesterday had gone; the golden cross, symbol

of sovereignty, was hidden from view.

When the day's work came to an end, he asked her to walk with him, and they set out in the delicious spring afternoon, this time not taking their favourite road by the sea, but following a rustic lane that wound inland amid heaths, rivulets, and hanging woods.

"Zoë," were his first words, "in a week's time we leave this place, but there is yet time for you to withdraw your generous promise, and remain behind. Are you quite sure that in keeping your word to me you are judging best for yourself. My happiness must not be bought at the cost of your own."

"I have promised—there is no more to say. Nothing can be changed now," she said, almost resentfully.

Explanations had, then, taken place between the two men? She was too proud to inquire what had happened. They walked on in painful silence, both wanting to speak, neither knowing how to begin. Her heart was swelling with pity, whether for him, for Delmar, or herself, she hardly knew, and he, in his turn, had never felt so remorsefully compassionate. This pale, trembling girl beside him was no longer a prop to lean on, a stately presence before which he bowed, but a crushed, wounded, timid thing.

"Dear sister," he began, in the same tone of mingled pride and humility, "understand my meaning quite clearly, ere it is too late for anything to be changed. You risked your life for mine once, and perhaps I can pay the debt in no other way. Take,

then, this renunciation at my hands, for it is all I have to give."

"I promised that I would never abandon you," she said, still with averted face. "Why do we waste words upon what is done and cannot be undone?"

"But," he urged, pleading manfully against his own interest, "I did not know when I asked you to stay with me always—perhaps you did not know yourself—how difficult such a promise might be to keep. We could neither of us foresee what the future might bring."

There was a rude stone Calvary close by, having wooden seats around, on which they sat down side by side. The gaunt, pathetic figure nailed to the cross, whose bowed head and attenuated arms stood out against the smiling blue heavens, hardly seemed

more at variance with the serene beauty of the place and the hour than those two pale, perplexed faces. How could they get to a clear understanding of each other's innermost thoughts? Both gazed upwards at the Image of Sorrow, interpreting it differently. To Gabriel it seemed as if he now, for the first time, realised that Divine spirit of self-sacrifice which had before been, by comparison, meaningless and cold. How often in former days had he embraced and prayed over the same symbol with mere mechanical words of transport and thanksgiving! Now all was clear as daylight—the life of love, and pity, and gentleness, the agony in the garden, the crowning despair. Did not the monastic career, with its systematic penance and renunciation, symbolise, after all, that spirit of self-sacrifice which alone

can sanctify human existence in the world? Thus he reasoned with himself, quickened to lofty aspirations and noble impulses, feeling just then as if to lay down his life for Zoë's sake would be easy, burning to imitate the boundless pity and matchless resignation imaged before him.

She gazed with different thoughts. The agonised countenance and tortured limbs, placed amid the lovely spring landscape, seemed to express the impotence of all love and devotion. How much sin remained in the world, despite Gethsemane and the Cross! How much sorrow, despite earthly sacrifice and individual renunciation! As she gazed, she thought of Lionel's lonely life, of Gabriel's, of her own. She had tried, at least, to make one of these three happy, and now the dreary conviction forced

itself upon her mind that the effort was a failure, and that but for her he might, perhaps, have been happier in a different way. The sight of his pale face moved her greatly. She had never before seen him so agitated.

"I will not break my word to you," she said, at last, smiling through her tears. "We must both try to forget as much of the past as we can. Who can bear to remember it altogether?"

Then she put her arm within his, and they turned their steps homeward, forcing themselves to talk of everyday things, apparently having finished discussion for once and for all.

Two or three days passed, she going through the day's routine with automaton-like impassibility and an outward cheerful-

ness that might well have deceived keener eyes than his. He noted the occasional pallor, almost rigidity of her face, and the unnatural poise of the habitually many-toned voice, but that was all. He took comfort in the thought that she had seen Delmar alone, thus affording him an opportunity for explanation. She had chosen her lot for herself, and it was not forced upon her.

What had passed between them it was not his business to inquire, still less concerning Zoë's mysterious journey to the island. So the eve of departure drew near, and only one day more remained of their stay at St. Yves. On the morrow they were to set out for Brest, where the ship lay at anchor that was to take them to the New World. Both had been more than usually busy during the

past week, but on that last afternoon there seemed nothing more left to do.

Gabriel accomplished the last of Zoë's errands expeditiously, and hastened home in the happiest mood, intending to take her for a last ramble by the sea-shore. It was barely three hours since they separated, yet how long the time had seemed to him away from her, and he pictured to himself now the approving smile she would accord him, and the readiness with which she would accede to his proposal! Throughout these last few days of extra activity and excitement, she had almost recalled her old self, running hither and thither with a song on her lips as she went, thinking of everything to be done, and doing her part brightly, bestowing sunshine everywhere. Life, indeed, to her meant action, and when she had not a

minute of the day left for brooding, she asked no more.

He had set out, then, carrying with him a grateful picture, feeling as if at last he stood on the threshold of hope, and what did he find on his return?

It was an April afternoon of extreme tranquillity and deliciousness, when, in this temperate zone, summer flowers burst into sudden bloom, and everything invites out of doors as in June. There were birds carolling in the blue heavens, balmy breath blown across the green fields, calm unbroken sunshine flooding the broad lands and quietly-lapping sea. At this especial hour of the day, the little town of St. Yves was stiller than perhaps at any other. The children were not yet out of school, no service was being performed at the Cathedral, shops and

offices had been closed. As he crossed the square, and gaily passed along the empty street, he paused, catching the strains of Zoë's piano. That delicate touch was not to be mistaken, and she had said to him at parting that she should play till the last moment, adding, quite cheerfully,

"You know a piano is not to be thought of in America till we grow rich, and that will not be for some time!"

When he was within a stone's throw of the house, the music ceased on a sudden and in the midst of a pathetic phrase. A musician must be imperatively disturbed to leave off just when gliding into a minor key with such effect, and Gabriel stood still wondering who their visitor might be, feeling sure that Zoë would not spoil a favourite passage of Beethoven for nothing. All was

silent, near and afar, except for a hushed sound as of a woman sobbing.

He approached the open window, and glanced in, his heart standing still as he gazed. What he saw was this. She had left her seat by the piano, and was kneeling before the sofa, with her face buried in the cushions, weeping bitterly. Having her back to the window, she remained wholly unconscious of his presence during the few seconds of his stay, for it was not longer, and no more was needed. During that momentary gaze he took in every detail of the picture, the open piano quitted so hurriedly, the neglected music-book, the kneeling, sobbing girl. For the first time he saw her in her hour of weakness, overcome by a sorrow stronger than herself. Quick as lightning the truth flashed across his mind.

He turned away, not daring to indicate his presence, for he knew that her grief was not for him to comfort.

He retraced his way down the street and across the square, then mechanically, not knowing or caring whither he went, so long as he was leaving that scene of desolation behind, took the direction of the shore. A few minutes ago his heart had bounded with hope and joy; now all the spring-tide was banished from the earth, and all the summer from his life. Zoë belonged not to him, indeed, but to Delmar, since she loved him only, and the rest to her was dust and ashes. Try as she might, she could no longer pityingly glamour and de-blind. His eyes were opened for once and for all. He was nothing to her, Delmar all in all.

Following the road he had traversed so often with her, he tried to shape his wavering purposes into tangible form. One sorrowful possibility presented itself as a solution again and again, and was alternately hailed and rejected. He must—he would—he could not give her up.

Now he said to himself that he would be, not magnanimous, but just, and force her to accept freedom at his hands; now he recoiled from the contemplation of such a step in dismay.

"Oh! Zoë," he cried aloud, "it is but your life I give you in return for mine! You saved me from dying once—is it not death in life to which you would be condemned with me?"

He had seated himself by the rocks in a

lonely bend of the shore, where he was wholly hidden from view, and covering his face with his hands, pondered long and bitterly.

Was he strong enough for such a renunciation as this? Could he turn his back upon such fair prospects, and encounter a loneliness and dreariness which could but increase as years wore on? What a home he had pictured in the New World with Zoë by his side—Zoë, by virtue of their altered circumstances, dependent on him in small things—Zoë to serve and cherish, and seek to make happy always! He wanted nothing else in the world, neither reputation, nor honours, nor wealth, only her.

He rose and walked on rapidly, not hoping to get away from unbearable

thoughts, having no haven of rest in view, only moving because repose was impossible. How far he went he did not know, but the sun slanted towards the western islands, and still he walked on, battling with his inner foe as he went, neither praying nor cursing, only warring with himself, wrestling between his better and worse part, fighting for mastery as for dear life. A thousand times he confessed himself vanquished, that his forces were spent, and will must have its way; but again a thousand times, he returned to the fight strengthened he knew not how.

It seemed to him as if two voices whispered in his ear, both subtle and seducing. One said: "Fool that thou art to dream of playing into the hands of Providence, heaven, fate, call it as thou wilt, by thy miser-

able little contribution of good or evil! Are not these far greater and higher than thou? Can thy feeble understanding measure the sum of righteousness and wrong-doing to the nicety of a hair's-breadth, and choose the better portion because it wears the sanctity of tears? Be content to follow the common ways of all mankind, and accept unquestioningly what good fortune or mishap is forced upon thee by the natural order of things."

The other said: "Oh! child of man, canst thou hesitate, canst thou pause when thy duty is manifest as the horizon, and transparent as the atmosphere around thee? What more of light or revelation needst thou than to know that thy suffering is another's felicity—thy renunciation another's

joyful fulfilment? Can a simpler lesson be accorded thee than this choice between thy smaller and larger self, thy fragmentary life and that of all humanity? Thinkest thou that any human being can say—I have a right to be happy? But the right to make others happy is bestowed upon all, and is the highest privilege awarded by the Creator to His children. Take warning in time, for when once the cup of unearned blessing has touched thy lips, it will be too late to draw back; the portion of the heavenly-minded—namely, of those who sow that others may reap, and taste a sorrow more blessed than joy, can never be thine."

Thus the young man was torn by distracting arguments, listening, on the one hand, to inclination, on the other to conscience, a

single ray of light guiding him through the maze. His love for Zoë made all things clear at last. It was not of himself he should think now, but of her. What had she not given him? For the last few months she had been unteaching the dreary lessons of his youth, opening his inner vision to the real meaning of the world, widening his moral and mental horizon every day, instructing him in the sweet, simple wisdom of domestic peace and joy, and in return for these benefits he had but one to give. His ever-watchful care and protectiveness could not make things even between them, much less his unalterable affection; but in restoring her to liberty, he felt that he should repay all. What was there to hinder her from a happy union with Delmar? She would forget him in time, or, at least,

learn to remember him without pain, and he would never let her know the cost of this sacrifice.

The contemplation of such a picture was not easy, and he turned from it again and again in growing bitterness. He saw Zoë by Delmar's side, an adored and adoring wife; Delmar roused from his cynicism, and resting in deep content after his lonely wandering; whilst for himself, what of happiness or content remained? Those two would reap their golden harvests; he could, henceforth, sow for others only.

Would his courage fail him at the last?

He retraced his way slowly, reiterating to himself that it must not be, and that were he unmanly to shrink from his self-imposed duty now, he should deserve the contempt

that Zoë's proud nature must sooner or later accord. How would it be possible to bear her kindness then?

CHAPTER XII.

SEEKING AND HIDING.

TRAVELLING is accomplished at a snail's pace in these regions; and though Zoë and Gabriel left home at dawn, they did not reach their destination before nightfall. The ship was not to start till midnight on the morrow, so they put up at an inn in the heart of the bright, busy, Italian-like city, sitting down to a table-d'hôte dinner with a numerous company of sea-captains, naval officers, and midshipmen, half a dozen anxious-faced women keeping

Zoë in countenance. These were broken-hearted mothers who had come to bid their cadets a long farewell, wives spending a few last hours with their husbands before years of separation, the feast wearing almost a funereal aspect. What tragedies, indeed, take place every day in hotels of seaport towns! Host and hostess welcome and nod adieu to their visitors smilingly, waiters and chamber-maids hurry about with baggage in the blithest manner. All is life, bustle, and cheerfulness, whilst a score of manly and gentle hearts are full to bursting.

The men eat, drink, and talk as usual, the women almost choke over a morsel, all knowing that in the harbour close by floats the Blue Peter, and that in a few hours they shall have lost their Beloveds for years, perhaps for ever!

Little divining all that passed in Gabriel's mind, Zoë looked out of her window next morning with a sense of positive exhilaration. There was a pleasant square in front of the hotel, planted with trees, where already crowds of children were playing in the sunshine, whilst beyond she caught a glimpse of the purple bay, shimmering into blue, with silvery sails skimming its smooth surface. All was animated, bright, and fresh, and feeling herself on a sudden transferred to a wholly new world, she smiled to herself, as one in a pleasant dream. The life before her could not have the sting of the old. Trouble there might be in store, but not trouble after the familiar pattern, and she was so young still, so strong, so full of hopes and capacities!

She should surely find consolation. The

mere consciousness of her newly-acquired freedom was seductive. She had cast off her chains for once and for all, and henceforth would be mistress of herself. The proud girl had not forgiven Delmar till now, for the sway he exercised over her, when, as it seemed, they were finally separated. She had not sent him away because she did not love him enough, but because she loved him too well. She shrank from the acknowledgment of such mastery. Was it in fear of herself—of him? She knew not what.

Putting on her hat and cloak, she descended to the square, and strolled up and down the lime-bordered walks, observing the busy crowds, the shop-windows, the handsome equipages, the thousand and one distractions of a brilliant little French city

on a sunny day. When, an hour later, Gabriel joined her, she greeted him with an animated face.

He had a letter in his hand which he had just fetched from the post, but without handing it to her, as he would have done at any other time, he said, with some embarrassment,

"Let us sit down. I have something to tell you."

"You have had a letter from Lionel?" she asked, her quick eye recognizing the familiar handwriting in a moment.

"Yes," he replied, looking more and more ill at ease. "He writes word that he will arrive this afternoon."

"Why should he come? Our adieux are made. There was nothing more to say to each other."

He was silent for a moment. Her manner dismayed him. The pale cheek had suddenly grown crimson, her eyes flashed, her lips trembled. He had prepared himself for surprise, not for anger.

"Why should he come?" she repeated, looking him straight in the face.

"And why should he not?" Gabriel replied, not feeling courageous enough to blurt out the truth. "He is my friend—he is your kinsman. We should both welcome him, I think."

Her kindled face was still turned towards him; he felt constrained to add—

"As he wishes to come."

"You must have suggested it; he would hardly have proposed another visit himself."

He had no word to say. She had turned

from red to pale now, and he saw that there were tears on her veil.

"Let us leave explanations to him," he said at last. "Perhaps you will then blame me no longer, and will see that I acted for the best."

That little speech made matters worse. She tried in vain to keep back the passionate words, but they would force a way.

"There was no cause for interference. I am not a child under your tutorship. I had given you no right to correspond with him on my behalf," she replied, bitterly. "We are parted, and nothing can bring us together again."

"You will at least see him?"

"How can I help it? I have not wings with which I can fly away," she said, still almost childishly vindictive. "But talking

is of no use. The mischief is done, and it is of your doing. We have no preparations to make, so we had better walk. Do not leave me."

All that bright forenoon they spent in rambling hither and thither, threading the gay streets, now looking down from the ramparts upon the majestic dockyards, now strolling far beyond the outskirts, whence they gained a delicious prospect of deep blue bay, gleaming white city, purple hills, and terraced gardens, Zoë keeping Gabriel with feverish impatience by her side.

"Do not leave me," she said, again and again; and looking on her pale cheek and troubled eyes, he felt more than ever that he had done well, and that her happiness, her all, lay in Delmar's hands.

When they entered the hotel to breakfast

at mid-day, she looked about wildly, for it was just possible that he might have arrived, but without once alluding to it. Fortunately for her, and for all three, he did come in the midst of the crowded table d'hôte. Anything like embarrassment or agitation was out of the question in such a scene. Delmar, who was always cool and collected at critical moments, nodded and smiled to his friends from the doorway, then slowly making his way to them, stood behind Zoë's chair till place could be made for him.

Every seat was occupied, and everyone seemed frantically hungry. There was no alternative but for Zoë, whose appetite had been satisfied with the first dish, to retire, leaving Delmar her place by Gabriel's side.

She went to her room, but soon found solitude and inaction insupportable. Then

she descended to the busy streets, trying to think of something she wanted to buy, racking her brain in search of errands. Finally she wandered away from the main thoroughfares, in the endeavour to lose herself for a time. No freshly-caught wild bird, beating its wings against the prison bars, chafed against her coming subjection more impatiently than she. He knew all. He had come. He would have his way with a word. By-and-by, sheer personal weariness compelled her to retrace her steps. The afternoon was now far advanced, and the square presented a brilliant and animated scene. A military band played spirited music, well-dressed picturesque crowds thronged the lime-bordered walks and benches, the men smoking cigars, the ladies chatting over their needlework, children sporting every-

where. Zoë sat down in a secluded corner with her hands folded on her knees, her eyes and ears taking in nothing of these pleasant sights and sounds. Escape was no longer possible. He must be listened to, be confessed to at last!

She had rested thus for about ten interminable minutes, when she caught sight of Delmar coming towards her alone. He wore a smile which she did not see, and which, perhaps, would have induced her to make one more effort at escape—a smile half of triumph, half of joy.

"I have been looking for you," he said, sitting down beside her.

"And I have been hiding from you," was all her answer, with down-dropped eyes and poppy cheeks.

"But you will not hide any more," he

said, playfully, soothingly, much as if she were a wilful child deserving reproof.

"*Le Dominateur! Le Dominateur!*" she cried, suddenly losing self-control, weeping wildly in the midst of the light-hearted crowd. "Why did you single out a ship with such a name? That was my name for you. You were my master always."

CHAPTER XIII.

A TRAP.

AN hour later Gabriel, watching the gay promenade from his hotel window, singled out one pair of loungers among the rest for his especial observation. The brilliant sunshine had vanished, but in the limpid twilight every object stood out distinctly—the white and purple blossom of the smaller magnolia, the blaze of camellia and rhododendron, the bright uniforms of the men, the dresses of the ladies. Inconspicuous enough was Zoë's travelling-dress and

little hat with its black lace veil, nor was Delmar a marked man in a crowd by reason of lofty stature or imposing appearance. Yet Gabriel's quick eyes detected them at a glance.

They were leisurely sauntering up and down just in front of the hotel, she leaning on his arm, he walking with head erect and triumphant step. There was no mistaking that quiet stroll, those linked arms, Zoë's downcast looks, Delmar's beaming port. All had been made clear as day. The two were reconciled past future misunderstanding.

As this conviction came home to him, another of more painful kind forced its way. Zoë and Delmar friends again, Zoë and Delmar betrothed—where was his own place in her affections now? What need

would she have of him henceforth? The two lovers would naturally be the whole world to each other, and in their happiness he could have neither part nor lot.

Swift as lightning, new thoughts flashed across his mind, dim notions shaping themselves rapidly into clear projects, indefinite wishes and longings taking tangible form. He would free her from the shadow of a bond to him, he would in his turn be generous, and force upon her the recantation of her word. She was kind and true, and wanted to brighten his life, but better for both that they should each go their own ways for once and for all.

By little and little, a scheme suggested itself to his mind, which, odd and fanciful as it might appear to others, seemed the only solution of the difficulty to him. What he

wanted to avoid was the pain of explanation and parting, above all, an interview with Zoë alone. He dreaded her tenderness, her power to shake his determination at the last. She might still waver between her love for Delmar and her friendship for him. He felt that the only security for all three lay in his own hands, and, with Jesuitical stealthiness, set to work to carry out his plans.

Meantime Zoë and Delmar, wholly unsuspicious of what was passing in his mind, oblivious of his existence even, continued their saunter under the trees. Twilight had now faded. Stars were coming out one by one. The music had ceased, and the crowds dispersed. Yet the lovers talked on, insensible alike to the fleeting hours and the imminent parting.

"I have made all my preparations. I have

bought my baggage. In a week's time I shall follow you," Delmar said, smiling, and what mattered a shorter or longer separation now? Had he said—"In a year I shall follow you," she would hardly have felt a pang. They were no longer strangers to each other. All that was dark had been cleared up.

By-and-by, a messenger from the hotel came running with a pencilled note in Gabriel's handwriting.

"Will you take Zoë on board?" it ran. "I want the next few hours to myself.

"GABRIEL."

Those few pencilled words changed their happy mood on a sudden. Delmar looked disturbed. Zoë sighed deeply.

"Poor Brother Gabriel!" she said, and that was all.

Both lapsed into silence till it was time to go indoors, and prepare for embarcation. Gabriel was nowhere to be seen, but the luggage had been already dispatched, and Delmar and Zoë followed in company of other passengers.

It was a night of superlative beauty, clear, luminous, starry, hardly a breeze stirring the sheeny wave, not a cloud veiling the wondrous heavens. Zoë, standing alone at the figure-head, gazed on the myriads of stars, lost in a momentary rapture. Her heart was no longer beating fast with new emotion; she was calm—not, perhaps, wholly happy, but herself again.

"Ah!" said Delmar, suddenly joining her, "never was a finer opportunity for

star-gazing than this, and as no one in his proper senses should take a sea-journey unprovided with a telescope, I procured one this morning as a parting present for Brother Gabriel. Look at it."

Zoë was enchanted. Here, at least, was a resource for the monotonous days in store for them, and, as she hoped, a new and abiding interest for her companion. On his account, therefore, less than her own, she welcomed the gift eagerly, and threw heart and soul into Delmar's directions concerning its use.

"We have still a little time," he said, adjusting the instrument, "and you must remember every word I say, and repeat it to Gabriel. Now pay attention, and I will teach you how to observe a star."

He possessed the enviable art of impart-

ing knowledge not only easily, but eloquently; nothing delighted him more than to open another quick mind to intellectual enjoyments familiar to himself. Zoë, like many curious and accomplished persons, had never in the course of her existence beheld a star through a telescope.

Once or twice, whilst thus occupied, she had begged him to go in search of Gabriel, but he replied, almost impatiently,

"He is sure to arrive in good time. Look to your glass."

As the minutes wore on, they found their new occupation too engrossing to allow of let or hindrance. They had plunged desperately into it as a relief from self and painful thoughts concerning Gabriel, and now it was not easy to break the spell. Those majestic movements of silvery

orbs, those rhythmic measures of shining worlds, filled their minds with awe and rapture. The familiar, caressing voice in Zoë's ear no longer trembled or rejoiced, her touch on his arm no longer thrilled, whilst he led her from one airy height of contemplation to another, without introducing an echo of life or passion. It seemed, indeed, as if Delmar were not speaking, as if her own personality and his had suffered temporary eclipse; and the two were, for the time being, mere intelligences, sympathies, meeting together in the highest quest.

"Look!" he cried, on a sudden, with new eagerness. "It is a pair of double stars I am going to show you now. Observe them well, for nothing more beautiful will ever greet your eyes. You see the two silvery discs revolving round each other

so shyly, yet so statelily? Now they tremble—now they touch each other lightly—now they appear as one!"

She followed his injunctions breathlessly, surrendering herself to the exquisiteness of a new impression, forgetting momentarily all else but that they were together, and gazing on the stars. So intent was she that she did not hear the signal of departure, and had quite lost sight of the impending farewell, her soul fastening itself to the lovely phenomenon as to a consoler, clinging to it wildly, conscious, in spite of the momentary tension, that something was dragging her back, that her rapture was for an instant only.

"I see," she cried. "Do not speak to me. Do not touch the glass. I want a moment to myself!"

A few seconds later, and Delmar caught the telescope from her trembling hand, and echoed her ejaculation of astonishment.

They were moving! The ship was on its way, and Gabriel had never come back!

CHAPTER XIV.

A MAN'S APOLOGY.

"IT is an error. He will overtake us in a boat, he is ever unpunctual," Zoë said, rising in great dismay. "Let us consult the captain as to what we should do?"

Delmar drew her back, smiling a little Jesuitically.

"We can do nothing now, and perhaps, for all our sakes, it is better so. Gabriel understands."

Zoë looked unconvinced, and overcome with mortification. She sat down, however, feeling her helplessness to act alone, and only able, after some minutes, to get out the trembling, almost scornful question,

"Then this has been arranged between you two? He had told you of his intention?"

"No, indeed," answered Delmar. "I am as much of a dupe in the matter as yourself. Only Gabriel is the plotter here."

"It is doubtless unintentional. He will follow us," she said, beginning to doubt in her own asseverations.

"He will follow us, without doubt, by-and-by, but not yet, and I think, if you re-

flect on his conduct, you will approve. Listen, Zoë, to the truth, put in the plainest possible words. You and I are betrothed lovers, about to be married as soon as ever we reach the other side of the Atlantic. We have been parted for a very long time, without any communication passing between us. How much there is for both of us to say, for both to listen to, in which Gabriel can have no part. With natural tact and delicacy, he has but made things easier for us all. Do not therefore blame him for his harmless bit of trickery. We shall repay his kindnesses by-and-by."

"What can we do for him?" Zoë asked, looking remorseful, and almost out of heart. Gabriel's loneliness weighed upon her as a burden of her own causing. She felt ashamed

to think of their own happiness, their sufficiency for each other, the glorious future in store for them.

"Everything," Delmar answered, with a lover's joyous confidence. "Occupation, friendship, a fireside, all these shall be his—but in good time. We must first settle ourselves happily in our new home, map out our daily existence, see what social and other claims we have upon us, in fine, get accustomed—" he smiled fondly on her, and added—"to happiness and each other."

"Can you think of some employment exactly suited to him?" she asked, still perversely deprecating the long confidential talk to which he was leading up. "It should not be too laborious, and yet not too easy, in the country if possible, and where he would

not lead a hermit's life, but mix among men."

"Come, let us leave Brother Gabriel for at least a quarter of an hour, and talk of ourselves. I promise to do all in my power on his behalf. He will not, I think, refuse to follow us a little later, but, as it is, he has acted in our interests instead of his own, and we are bound to be grateful."

Zoë sat with bowed head, and hands folded passively on her knees.

"Do you not want to know why I held silence throughout those long months, and a little of what happened to me all the time? Do you not want to tell me about yourself? Ah! you have perhaps not yet forgiven me for certain ill-considered words dropped in your ears whilst we were momentarily expecting our doom on the island?"

"Let us both forget it," she said, in a pained tone, every trifling incident connected with the inundation coming back vividly, as if all had happened yesterday—Gabriel's agitation, Delmar's passionate appeal, her own mute submission, Huberte's anger and scorn, the after-blank!

"But it was a long time before I could forgive myself," Delmar replied. "Come, take my arm, let us pace the deck, and you shall have my apology for all that I thought or did amiss. To-morrow we can confer together upon Gabriel."

She obeyed, and for an hour or two they slowly walked up and down the gently gliding deck, he talking eagerly and uninterruptedly, she listening with only monosyllabic answers now and then. He told her his

history from his youth, as he could not tell it before, whilst they were mere friends and kinsfolk, baring his heart, sparing neither his follies nor his errors, painting himself to her exactly as he was, and his life precisely as it had been. He had no desire to pose in the eyes of the woman about to be his wife, rather he desired that their compact and union should be based on closest confidence and unshakeable trust. So he told her all, and when Zoë learned how he had suffered, how he had loved and been deceived, how he had battled with disappointment and despair, she rejoiced in the growing consciousness of her power to make him happier, more hopeful. She felt that if felicity was the portion of none, at least whatever of sorrow fell to their share could be lightened by mutual trustingness and love, and she

determined to be ever after joyous for his sake.

That brief voyage of bright skies, smooth seas, and favouring breezes seemed to her a happy augury for the future, and when misgivings crowded her mind as to Gabriel's lot, she put them away self-reprovingly. He would share alike their worldly well-being and fireside happiness by-and-by, and be indeed their brother by adoption as long as he lived. Let no one blame her or her lover, if during the next few weeks they forgot even his existence. Zoë no sooner touched the shores of her new home than she was made Delmar's wife, and in the blissful "settling down" that followed it was hardly likely they should think of anyone else.

But when, at last, they wrote to the ad-

dress added to his parting letter, no answer came. The first was followed by a second, the second by a third, yet Gabriel never wrote.

"He blames us for our first silence. He thinks we are growing cold," Zoë said, with tears in her sweet eyes, and sitting down, she wrote once more, this time with almost passionate entreaties for a word, a sign from him.

Nor was this missive more successful than its precursors. Then they ceased writing altogether, and tried to get news of him by other means, for some time unsuccessfully.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BATTLE OF LIFE.

LONG, indeed, ere the signal-bell had rung, Gabriel was on his way—he knew not whither. He only knew that he was speeding by express train farther and farther from his two friends every minute, and that in all probability they were parted for the term of their mortal lives.

He was equal to laying a trap with Jesuitical cunning, but here only the simplest artifice had been necessary. The three were

strangers in the place. Their plans, their business, and their identity were alike indifferent to all around them; and when he dispatched Delmar's baggage to the ship instead of his own, no suspicion was thereby aroused. The landlord of the hotel felt slight interest in the little party, so long as their bills were paid, and the alteration of names at the booking-office seemed easily accounted for in the prevailing puzzledom of French officials concerning English orthography. Delmar had perhaps been spelt backwards, phonetically, or anyhow wrong, and now it was put right. There the matter ended.

On board, where he made his appearance for a few minutes, occurred a slight difficulty. The steward, who had been expressly told by Delmar that the occupant of

a specified berth was to come on board with the baggage, and that he himself was returning, could not understand this apparent complication. But Gabriel's statement was effectually clinched by a little gold piece.

"The gentleman sitting yonder with telescope in hand is the passenger for whom No. 20 is taken," he said, "and you are to hand him this note as soon as the ship has started. I must be off at once."

He had recognized the pair in the distance, mere grey silhouettes against the brilliant starlit heavens. Zoë's slender figure wrapped in a grey travelling-cloak, with her head eagerly raised; Delmar's spare yet manly form, in his close-buttoned, fur-bordered over-coat, by her side, holding the telescope.

That was the last glimpse he caught of the two friends he loved so well and who loved him so dearly. There was not a minute to lose, his boat was waiting; the briefest possible delay might have undone all. He staggered blindly down the hatchway, bribed his boatman almost maniacally to get back quickly, jumped into the first hackney carriage he met, reaching the railway-station just in time to catch a fast train bound for Paris.

When fairly on his way he breathed more freely. By this time Delmar had received his missive, and Zoë would know all. The pair would be realising the happiness in store for them, a happiness partly of his own making. In thus freeing Zoë from any real or fancied allegiance to him, he was doing all that in him lay to

repay his debt. He owed her his life, and he had nothing to give her but absence and oblivion.

And now he was unutterably alone in the world. Waking from a deep sleep at break of day, he looked out on the rosy east, the budding trees, the pleasant homesteads with a new sense of loneliness. His unsophisticated, hitherto self-satisfied nature was stirred into a sudden sense of humility and nothingness. What was he without her?

And that other and direr loss? Where was peace to come from? Once religion, or rather the mould in which religion had been cast, seemed exactly fitted to his needs; the support withdrawn, the wall of defence pulled down, he felt as if chance and accident must now do with him as they would.

But Paris roused him, and here, at least,

for a time, he decided to pitch his tent and try his fortunes. He had not a single acquaintance in the capital; he was furnished with nothing in the way of an introductory letter; he did not possess those practical notions which enable some men to make their way anywhere and under the most adverse circumstances, and his sole fortune consisted of a few hundred francs. Still he was in Paris! Paris was the world, and if there were no room for these, where, indeed, could it be found? He had yet to learn that bitterest of all lessons forced upon proud human nature, namely, the preciousness of place in the world, and the redundancy of capacities for filling it. This overactive, over-crowded city of Paris needed him not, it could carelessly boast of intelligences like his own far over and above its

needs; every fresh effort on his own behalf resulted in the same conviction put before him as plainly as words could put it—"Seek elsewhere for a place; thine is not here." With what irony we speak of the wide world! Every day its littleness, compared with the bigness of our wants, becomes more apparent.

Gabriel battled on manfully, to-day trying in one quarter, determined to-morrow to try in another. Bodily privation and inadequate means troubled him little; all he asked was work and the free, natural existence of other men, a participator in the labours, joys, and sorrows of his fellows. If Paris failed, he would seek a livelihood elsewhere. If his brains would not suffice, there were at least his strong arms.

Where one romance ends, another begins,

and here opens the true story of Gabriel's life, its purest joy, its darkest tragedy; but let his own words briefly tell the history of those probationary years in the world. Several summers after his sudden flight to Paris, Huberte received the following letter for transmission to their common friends in America. It bore neither date, address, nor signature, and was written rapidly, almost illegibly, very little resembling that carefully-penned manuscript, bound with vellum, Delmar had received from the monastery long before :—

"My friends must often have thought of me with tenderest concern," he wrote, "and I should have sent them tidings many and many a time, only I feared to give you pain—to appear, indeed, almost to reproach you for the part you have played in shaping

my destiny. Need I say it? Good fortune has not always followed me on my way. I have never for a single moment repented of putting my hand to the plough, but hitherto I have found the path of truth and conscience thorny and steep, not to be trodden without dire stumblings and painful hindrances at every step. I repeat those words, truth and conscience, advisedly, and with deep meaning. For what else have I been betrayed?—for what else have I suffered?—for what else am I doomed to a life perhaps as fragmentary as it is possible to conceive?

"I was driven from the cloister—rather, I may say, the Romish Church—into the world, because I saw that there human life was nothing, and righteousness nothing, but the strong arm of the priest, from the highest

to the lowliest, all in all; that it is not universal peace, happiness, and virtue she is striving after, nor, least of all, universal belief in a pure, soul-lifting faith, but temporal power, the spiritual subjection of mankind, and the spread of dire and demoralizing superstitions. This is what I left behind, and if I cannot aver that I have found my ideal of human existence in the world, I have at least found honest striving after daily bread, pure domestic affections, and a standard of truth, honour, and charity unknown within the monastery walls.

"Three months after my arrival in Paris, my position seemed growing desperate. I had knocked at a hundred doors in vain—I had offered myself as author, secretary, copyist, schoolmaster, clerk, Heaven knows what! and all to no purpose. There was ever a sur-

plus of men more experienced than myself in each and all of these capacities. Nothing daunted, I persevered, fascinated to Paris by I know not what spell, since I stood as much outside its political, social, and literary life, as if I had been a prisoner confined within four walls. But nothing called me elsewhere, and from the midst of these self-occupied crowds, I kept hoping that some friendly hand would be held out to me.

"And so indeed it was, when my future seemed growing desperate. Standing one day before a bookstall—that refuge of the forlorn scholar!—I was turning over the leaves of a quarto edition of St Basil, when I fell into conversation with a daily frequenter of the quays, like myself, who, in spite of his shabby appearance, at once betrayed his scholarship and breeding. He was, in-

deed, a rich book-collector, and finding, upon further talk, how intimate I was with the Fathers, he took me home, in order to show me his rare books, and to profit by my Patristic erudition. I told him my history, and he gave me some weekly occupation in his fine library, where, working away undisturbed from morning till night, in the midst of old manuscripts and folios, I could almost fancy myself in some mediæval Scriptorium. Then, when he required my services no longer, my kind old friend tried to find me employment in one of the public libraries, but without success. Every post, from the highest to the most subordinate, was filled, or, if empty, was sought for by dozens of candidates more influentially supported than myself.

"By dint of great exertions, however, my patron at last procured me the post of secre-

tary to a certain Abbé, a well-known man of letters, scholar, and controversialist. My story was of course withheld from him, and as he was too engrossed in his own occupations to feel curiosity about me, and I suited him exactly, all for a time went well. My modest earnings sufficed for my wants. I gained also a little by literature. My kind friend, the bibliophile, made me always welcome, where I tasted the quiet pleasure of family life. He was a widower, but his young daughter kept his house, and the children of her elder sister, who lived under the same roof, were my constant playmates. Sometimes we spent pleasant days at Fontainebleau or Meudon, sometimes we went to the Théâtre Français, and witnessed the *Tartuffe* or *Athalie*, and every Sunday evening they gathered their

friends about them, when we passed the hours pleasantly in music and conversation.

"Ah! that was a blessed time! I had all that I asked at the hands of a benevolent Providence—useful toil, a mind at ease, human sympathy, hope, liberty! I had indeed misread my own mind in those early days, when I fancied myself ambitious and aspiring. Only the natural lot of an ordinary human being was what I needed, and this was now mine.

"All this time I had been acting the part of tutor to Marie, my old friend's daughter, instructing her in English, a little mathematics, and other things young Frenchwomen are now beginning to learn. She was as yet a mere child, being barely seventeen, and as such I regarded her, never for a moment thinking that our relations of

master and pupil would change. Nor did they, as far as we two were concerned. Marie, though fast developing into a woman, had none of the coquetry of her sex, and our intercourse was the friendliest it is possible to conceive. She had seen nothing of the world of fashion, and possessed none of the accomplishments so appreciated in society; in fact, she had some leaning to books, a taste her father fostered by all means in his power. Thus it came about that he was delighted to see her interest in my studies, and her growing capacity for appreciating his fine library.

"One day he said to me, in the simplest, gravest manner, with the air of a man who has slowly made up his mind,

"'My dear young friend, you see how dearly I prize my library, and how I love

my daughter. To feel that my books will be lovingly cared for when I am in the grave, and that my child will have a husband worthy of this double heritage, are the two wishes dearest to my heart. I am growing old, and I wish, without further delay, to see these wishes fulfilled. I know your history, I appreciate your learning and moral worth. In your hands I wish to leave my books and my daughter. You cannot refuse!'

"What could I say? Marie was to me a docile pupil, a charming child, and nothing more. I was to her an indulgent tutor, an authority on many subjects, a friend in whom she could trust generally. That was all. We were comrades, indeed friends, and cared for each other as such. Any other feeling had never entered my head, and was

quite out of the question. I therefore hesitated.

"'You pause? You need time for reflection?' asked my good old friend, with much concern.

"'Not on my own account, but on hers,' I said. 'How can I make that child happy? What do I know of her innermost thoughts and aspirations?'

"'She trusts you. That is enough. Do not let misgivings cross your mind. Say Yes, and make me happy.'

"How, indeed, could I refuse? Gratitude, affection, duty even, compelled me to follow his inclination rather than my own. Slowly, unwillingly even, my lips framed an affirmative.

"Yet a little later, when my old friend had joyfully brought Marie to my side, not

blushing and trembling, but staid and demure, seeing in such a circumstance only a natural event in a French girl's life, taking it all as a matter of course, and we all three sat in conclave, talking of the future, I could but feel that I had done wisely, for myself as well as others. I was anchored at last, securely armed against harm and misfortune. I had made my benefactor happy, and had secured for myself protection, companionship, and a home. And the dreary struggle for bread was over, for once and for all.

"But the next morning, as I opened the window of my little attic, before sitting down to study, gazing with rapture at the glittering panorama beneath, the pearly sky above, feeling unspeakably joyous and content, wondering if indeed life were the

thorny wilderness, the vale of tears, poets and theologians represent it, when the door was burst open suddenly, and my old friend rushed in, pale, breathless, agitated.

"'Fly, my son,' he said, embracing me again and again with tears, 'there is not an instant to lose; your identity is discovered, your enemies have planned your ruin. Stay for nothing, but begone—to England—to Switzerland—no matter where, so long as you hide yourself.'

"And the next day I was once more alone in the world—a stranger and an alien in a foreign city, uprooted for ever from the friendly abiding place where I had revelled for the second time in the deliciousness of home. Whether or not the good old man had exaggerated the danger hanging over me, I know not. This only I learned from

his letter afterwards—that the Abbé, without hinting a word upon the subject, had long known my history in the minutest particulars, and that I was to be the victim of a series of persecutions which would inevitably have brought about my worldly ruin. I escaped with my liberty, and thought myself fortunate. Still I could not abandon this fair France where I had been so wretched, so happy! I have never once quitted the country of my adoption, and some day or other, will tell you how it has fared with me throughout the later stages of my career, but now I will say no more. Ah! when I am most weary, my friends, what a magnet draws me to that antique city on the river where we first met! I feel as if I had but to pass within its precincts to find everything unchanged, the

pleasant room looking down on the boulevard, the three new-made friends talking animatedly together throughout the long spring afternoon, the girl with her golden hair and sprightly talk, the savant with his kindly cynicism, the Franciscan brother with his passionate eloquence!

"And yet what remains of that real, living past but a memory? What are we now to each other but a name? My heart yearns to you across the dividing seas, the silent years! I would fain take you both by the hand and hear your beloved voices once again, but something holds me back. I cannot come to you if I would. Against my will I must keep out of your sight yet awhile. Farewell."

CONCLUSION.

IT is the goldenest time of the year in the majestic old City of a Hundred Bridges. The river flows swift and steely bright past merchant palace and long lines of quay and serried ships, the gardens have a tropical splendour and lusciousness, the noonday sun floods city and suburb with ambered light, everything invites abroad. Shutters are put up to keep out the sunshine, as in July, idlers sit drowsily under the lime and magnolia trees, glad of any shelter they can get. Outside the town there is dappled light and shadow in plenty, delicious little

rural corners where you least expect to find them, cool glades bordering upon dusty highways, dells and alleys within a stone's throw of populous boulevards, breezy spaces carpeted with daisies and buttercups, limpid rivulets singing amid tangled hedgerows, silence, solitude, and bird-singing everywhere.

Two travellers, who had reached Les Ponts that very morning, were making their way on foot to a suburban village on its inland side. One could see at a glance that they were foreigners and tourists, yet hardly unfamiliar with the place, or they would not so easily have threaded the labyrinthine lanes and side-paths leading to their destination. Well protected by their broad-brimmed travelling-hats and white cotton umbrellas, they slowly climbed a steep road winding towards the country; then, still ascending,

they skirted clover-fields and market-gardens, finally flanking a tiny village perched on an airy height. Resting for a little while beneath a wayside hedge, they turned round to gaze admiringly on the panorama spread before them—slope upon slope of wood and pasture at their feet, châteaux and convents shining amid the green; then the terraced city, so proudly crowning the glorious river, flowing towards the sea, with lovely islets on its broad blue bosom. The pair, looking with such thoughtfulness upon this superb picture, said not a word to each other, but both seemed absorbed in half joyous, half pensive retrospection. For a time they stood thus lost in thought, then, like one suddenly waking from a dream, the man said to the sweet, stately woman by his side,

"Come, Zoë, he will be looking for us. We will visit our little glades to-morrow."

She did not blush now, as in former days, at this quick interpretation of her thoughts, but, putting her hand within his arm, said simply,

"It seems but yesterday since we were there, and it is ten years ago!"

"Yes, ten years," Delmar answered, in his old half-playful, half-ironical manner. "We are no longer romantic; we have no lovers' quarrels. I am growing old, you are growing severe, and it is better so; yet those foolish days were worth a king's ransom."

Zoë was silent. Lifting her eyes towards the line of scattered houses now close at hand, she seemed on the look-out for some one.

"This is the village," she said, "and that last cottage, with its straggling garden, must be his. But he will not be prepared for us, perhaps, so soon. We have travelled faster than we thought."

"True," Delmar answered; "he may be absent even. The place is as still as death."

It was a tiny, yet not uncheerful, green-shuttered, white-walled cottage, shut off from the public way by a wall, and entered only by a small side-door leading into the garden. They lifted the latch and walked in unobserved, passing suddenly from sunshine into grateful shadow. Beyond the vine-covered wall and umbrageous medlar-trees stretched a vast enclosure of fruit, flower, and vegetable garden, in alternating belts and patches. There were brilliant mosaics of autumn flowers, trellised apple and pear-

tree, laden with mellowing fruit, beds of silvery green artichoke and purple beet-root, all bearing evidence of unremitting care and skilled culture.

Whilst they feasted their eyes on this refreshing prospect—for does anything so well refresh tired eyes as the sight of a well-kept garden?—odorous breaths were wafted from neighbouring rose and myrtle, and the dewy coolness of recently-watered parterre and gravel walk, added to the general deliciousness. Outside that modest little portal were glaring white walls, dusty roads, and parched-up turf; here all was fresh and fragrant as in the newly-created Eden.

The two stood for a moment enraptured, then cast expectant glances to the right and to the left, waiting for the host and his welcome. Delmar suddenly put one hand on

his wife's arm, and with the other indicated a busily-occupied figure in a neighbouring alley.

"It is he," he said, in a voice suddenly freighted with almost womanly gentleness. "How changed! How much older! Yet it is he!"

Zoë recognized Gabriel at once, and they advanced towards him; in a minute the three friends had met after many years, and were standing with hands clasped, Zoë in tears, the men much moved, all silent for awhile.

There was deep tenderness mingled with some pain in the playful scrutiny that followed, Delmar holding out Zoë at arm's length to be looked at, Gabriel by turns surveying and surveyed, each conscious of what was going on in the other's mind. At

length Delmar said, giving utterance to the common thought, "We are growing old!"

The intervening years had perhaps played least havoc with himself, for he had ever been prematurely silvered, and his spare yet manly figure had lost nothing of its elasticity. His eyes were brilliant as ever, his smile no less winning, his port infinitely franker, gayer, happier than of old. It seemed, indeed, as if, in his case, Time had acted the part of re-juvenator, his very voice sounding more youthful, his laugh fresher. With Gabriel it was not so. He had only just reached the middle term of life, that halting-point when Dante saw his great vision, but every vestige of youth was gone. The Hyperion bloom and curls of his early manhood were replaced by sunburnt skin and whitening hairs, the erect stature and trip-

ping gait for care-lined brows and bent shoulders, the exuberant animal spirits and joyous bearing for quiet thoughtfulness and melancholy repose. Something better than mere guileless youth was here, something indescribable, yet readily discerned, even by the careless, whilst those gifted with insight would at once see that a story belonged to him of no common kind.

Zoë also was changed, but she was Zoë still, a little calmer, a little graver, yet every inch her old self. None other—at least, so thought Gabriel—had her benignant smile, her winning ways, no face in all the world such tenderness, no voice such witchery as hers! As she stood before him now, he saw the well-remembered look that had never faded from his memory, a look of intense, pitying kindliness and love, lavished not only

upon himself, but every unhappy thing in the world, unspeakably searching, caressing, and dear.

"I think I look the older of the three," Gabriel said, smilingly, as he stood between his friends, holding a hand of each. "But you see me at my worst—unkempt, toil-stained, and unfit to be seen in a lady's presence. I did not suppose that you could arrive till to-morrow, and was making my little domains look their very best in your honour. I had begun to garland the house, too, in readiness. But let us go indoors; it is cooler there."

He led the way to a little room—clean, cool, and ascetic as his cell of old, and, fetching a bottle of wine, with fruit and bread, bade them heartiest welcome.

"You are travelling alone?" were almost the first words he uttered.

"We have no children," Zoë answered, somewhat sadly.

"And no near kin—neither brother nor sister, nephew nor niece," put in Delmar. "You, also, are alone in the world, my friend. Return with us. Make our home your home. We desire nothing better."

Gabriel shook his head.

"My wife must persuade you," Delmar continued. "Meantime, let me compliment you on the excellence of your products. More delicious fruit could not be set before a prince, and the wine, I daresay of your own growing, is grateful to the palate. But tell us, first of all, how came you to pitch your tent here, and what calling do you pursue?"

"My calling is of the humblest," Gabriel said, pointing to his garden. "That little

bit of ground belongs to me, and it supplies my simple needs. How I came to settle here, in the first instance, is still a mystery to myself; but let me go back and explain a little. You know what my early struggles in Paris were, and what a bitter ordeal I went through in the effort to get a footing in the world, in other words, to earn bare bread. I failed again and again, and though I now see that failure was inevitable, I resented it bitterly then. Remember, I had no practical training to turn to account in the struggle for existence. My acquirements were antiquated, my habits of life had totally unfitted me for an active career. I found myself slow to learn, and inapt at receiving new ideas. Still I would not despair, and after a long series of disappointments and misadventures following those

you already know of, and which I need not particularise, I had the good fortune to get some years' regular employment as interpreter and clerk in a business house in the south, during which I continued to lay by a little money, always in the vague hope of some day crossing the sea and pitching my little tent near yours."

"Then why reject our importunities now?" said Delmar. "Use your eloquence, Zoë, prevail upon him."

Again Gabriel shook his head pensively, and continued,

"After several years' imprisonment in an office, I found myself the happy possessor of a thousand and odd francs, and suddenly possessed with an inordinate desire to wander, and to be my own master for a time.

"Just then the last fateful war broke out

between France and Germany, and the whole country was in a ferment; from one end to the other popular feeling blazed out against despotism, and the hated name of the Bonaparte! The enemy, indeed, was hailed by many as the liberator, and war rather as a wholesome purging of traitors than a calamity and a scourge. Business houses collapsed by thousands, and that of my employers among the number; so with the natural instinct of all ardent spirits, I went to Paris. Then indeed came those experiences of active life for which, in the first days of my enfranchisement, I had longed, and which I had projected. For once I found room for my powers and energies. I threw myself into the current of the moment, and was all and everything by turns, revelling in the consciousness of activity, and the ever-chang-

ing excitement of every hour. I was everything and all things by turns—journalist, agitator, club-orator, soldier; of course a persistent Republican of the most pronounced kind throughout each phase of my career. This was indeed to live, to be a citizen and a man! This was life in its fullest, worthiest sense!

"Here was no question of expediency, material advantage, and the interests of the hour. All but the meanest and the craven-spirited lived, not in the misery of the present, but in the glorious future of Republican France! The bodily privations we were undergoing, the cruel sufferings of the men keeping guard throughout that pitiless winter, the agonized suspense of the women, family losses, worldly ruin, all these were nothing, and the blessed reality in store

—as we hoped and believed—all in all! I forgot in those memorable days of alternating exultation and despair, bitterness and hope, that I was not a Frenchman born and bred. I became one with the cause I had espoused—namely, that of human liberty in its widest sense, liberty of speech, liberty of the press, above all, emancipation from priestly rule! No born Jacobin was more devoted to this watchword than I—the whilom devotee, the renegade, the apostate! My eyes had been opened to the truth of history, not by books, but by facts, and by living among men. I saw clearly what theologians refuse to see, what priests, by virtue of their calling, are bound not to see, how intimately despotism, whether spiritual or temporal, and corruption, are bound up together; how falseness is allied to super-

stition, immorality, in the widest sense of the word, to priestly rule, based on the confessional and the inculcation of false dogma. I realized the immeasurable hypocrisy of those who lead the unthinking masses by means of doctrines they do not themselves believe, or, if they did believe, must, by the nature of such intellectual obliquity, be rather fitted for the lunatic asylum than the pulpit!

"Ah! my friends, will it ever be made clear how the priests played into the hands of the second Cæsar during his twenty years' sway? how the priests fostered the immorality of the Second Empire, and paved the way to the wholesale retribution soon to overtake France? This is the great lesson for history to teach us some day, but it will be long ere mankind generally credits the story

or profits by the moral to be drawn from it.

"But I must pass rapidly over the siege, the capitulation, and come to the Commune. It was not to be expected that I should steer clear of that rock on which so many well-meaning enthusiasts and ardent Republicans split. I do not, mind you, now defend the movement into which I was drawn, against my better reason, and, like many another, by sheer force of circumstances. Were the same crisis to occur again, I am obliged to confess that I should most probably be led to act in precisely the same way. I cannot conceive of any other course open to those who had set out with such convictions as mine. In demanding the liberties of civic government, it seemed to me that the Republicans—Reds, if you will—were demanding the first and most natural

and logical right of free-born men, above all, citizens under a Republican Government. The after-excesses on both sides, the fearful antipathies of fellow-countrymen, the inhuman thirst for blood, on the part alike of victor and vanquished, are circumstances wholly abnormal, needing neither obloquy nor defence; we see that they arose out of a state of things wholly and entirely exceptional, a state of things which, there can be little doubt, would be followed by the same results in any other country.

"Well, to come to an end of my long story, I took up arms for the Commune. Had my convictions been entirely on the other side, my only alternative would have been a dozen balls in my breast. I lived throughout those blood-stained days of May, and I escaped by means of an old friend, of whom I wrote to you years ago,

the bibliophile. He secreted me for many weeks in his house, and when it was safe to quit Paris, procured me the necessary papers. My nationality, my Anglo-Saxon complexion and fair hair, made things easy. Once out of Paris, I could go whither I chose without fear. I visited several parts of France which had especial interest for me; I tried, by means of new scenery and new surroundings, to shake off the nightmare that had got possession of me, but in vain. The horrors I had witnessed during the last agony of the Commune, the fearful reprisals on both sides, the fiendish slaughter of old men, women, and children, the conflagrations on all sides, the odour of blood and pestilence with which the city reeked—all these things I could not forget; and mingled with the horror of the times came a heavy sense of hopelessness and despair. I

could not hope in the future of France then; on every side seemed darkness and misery.

"At last I came here, indefinitely longing, yet always hesitating, to set out in search of you. The sight of the ships and the river flowing to the sea drew me forward, but something ever held me back. As chance would have it, I happened, on arriving here, to find this tiny spot to sell, and the beauty of the place, the softness of the climate, the thousand and one associations that the city possessed, decided me. I said to myself that the owner of a little bit of land need never starve in France, and that here, at least, I should find contentment and repose. The soil produces abundantly; a little orphan lad I have adopted, helps me in my labours, and carries my goods to market.

We rear poultry, keep bees, cultivate simples, make a little wine, and find a ready market for everything; in the evening I teach the boy to read and write, and pore over my favourite books. Yes, I have found repose at last."

"Have you no friends?" asked Zoë.

"I have neighbours, but I hide myself as much as possible from the world. Not that I any longer stand in dread of my identity as Capucin or Communist being discovered, or possible harm arising therefrom. See," he said, moving to the window, and lifting a finger in the direction of the city, "that tiny speck of gold to the left of the magnificent cupola of St. Louis is the golden cross that marks the Franciscan monastery. Thus I am ever reminded of my former condition."

"Better not to be reminded of it, I should say," Delmar broke in, kindly and cordial, but inclined to satirize. "My dear friend, renounce this unwholesome solitude; travel with us for a time; see what is most memorable in the old world—Rome, Athens, the Pyramids—then accompany us to the new. Why, in the name of Heaven, should you stay here, a quasi St. Hilarius, a Jerome without his *raison d'être?* You will perhaps grow into the worst of all hermits some day, and never lay your head on your pillow till you have counted your hoardings."

"I will tell you why I stay here," answered the other, without heeding the sarcasm. "You will smile at me, and call me childish, inconsequent, what you please, but I give you the reason, such as it is. I do not ex-

pect to attain old age, nor can I say that I desire it. I am shattered in health and broken in spirit, and when I perceive my end drawing near, I should like to be within reach of that glittering cross I have just indicated to you."

Delmar smiled. He went on—

"You look up curiously. I will state my reason. I feel as if, with the consciousness of ebbing life upon me, and with all things growing dim alike to my inner eye and outer vision, I should be possessed by one passionate longing, one all-powerful wish, namely, to knock at the door of the monastery—where, without doubt, I should be taken in—to put the brown robe on my body, the girdle on my waist, the crucifix on my breast, and lying down on the familiar pallet where I once slept so peacefully, die as I lived in youth,

a Capucin brother. I think I should desire nothing else in that supreme hour but entire reconciliation with the Church and the world, with all those who have used me amiss, and with those I have unduly reproached and despised. I should cling, moreover, as men do in their last moments, to the recollections of my youth, its joyousness, its unabating confidence, and putting all else aside, the love and the hate, the sin and the sorrow, tasted in the world. 'I believed!' I should murmur with my dying lips. 'I was honest, I was happy!'"

"You are growing morbid," Delmar said. "This excessive isolation is not good for you."

"Come with us," Zoë added, softly, and laying a slender white hand on her friend's toil-embrowned fingers. "You are alone,

and we will be sister and brother to you. You have as yet put forth no unanswerable plea."

As she said this, she gazed into his eyes with that insinuating persuasiveness he remembered so well. But the charm worked not as of old. He took both her hands in his own, and replied evenly, almost coldly, whilst he met her sweet, compassionate looks,

"Dearest Zoë, your husband says truly, I am growing morbid. I am too solitary. Once, indeed, I wished for nothing better than to see the ancient cities and strange countries you are about to visit together. But do not urge me, I am best left alone here. You two are enough for each other."

They said no more, and the little repast being finished, he invited them to make the

round of his garden with a cheerful air, cutting the choicest blossoms for Zoë, proudly indicating to both the superb melon-trees here, the heavily-laden vine there. Once, when he quitted his guests for a moment in quest of scissors and thread, Delmar whispered to his wife,

"He has suffered more than we know of, but we have come too late to work the cure. He is sick both in body and in mind. He will soon die!"

"God forbid!" Zoë answered, in a low tone.

Then he came up, and the three exerted themselves to spend their last hours together cheerfully. Gabriel smiled approvingly as Zoë placed some of his flowers in her hat and in her girdle. Delmar entered with enthusiasm into the respective merits

of the French and American pippin. Then Gabriel led them into his herbarium, and bestowed precious flower-remedies and specifics for this ailment and that.

"You both know, I daresay," he said, "that in France the profession of herbalist is still respected, and, perhaps, the most lucrative part of my business is that of cultivating medicinal flowers. Take these little packets with you. It will please me to think that I shall perhaps heal your maladies when we are far apart."

"Physician, heal thyself," Delmar said, affectionately laying his hand on the other's shoulder. "How can we trust your remedies when we behold you? Gather a little flesh about these bones of yours, put blood into your cheeks, quicken your feeble pulse, then talk to us about your omnipotent

medicines for fleshly ills. Why should you die?"

"Why should I live?" Gabriel answered, smiling. "Answer me that question, if you can—or you," he added, turning to Zoë. "Is not the world full enough without me? Does it not possess enough and to spare of such capacities as mine? I foolishly imagined once that I was born for a purpose, but experience has undeceived me."

"Could not each of us make such a confession?" asked Delmar. "Are not all lives mere parodies upon the dream of our youth? Cast off these idle fancies, cease to make mischievous comparisons, and rouse yourself to accept the world and your portion of it for what they are. And once more, my wife and I bid you come with us."

They had finished their turn of the garden now and halted, looking sea-ward, having the setting sun and wide-spread champaign behind, the burnished city and majestic harbour before, a riper glow than that of noonday now cast about smiling earth and shimmering sky. For a while they stood thus without speaking, neither glad nor sorrowful, full of the rich life that had been, the quiet future to come.

"Must it be farewell then?" Zoë said, at last, wrapping her cloak round her to go. "We must leave you now, and to-morrow by this time we shall be again on our way. Before starting for Europe, we had prepared a room for our Brother Gabriel after his own heart; everything shall be as you wish in your new home, and meantime this foreign journey will

make you strong and well. Ah! do not refuse," she pleaded, tearfully. "We shall think that you love us no longer."

But again her beseechings were idle. He gave a hand to each, reiterated the words—Farewell, Farewell!—unfalteringly, though kindly, then let them go, and watched them wind down the dusky hill without emotion. Those two retreating figures, indeed, seemed to him a part of his life long since cold, dead, inanimate; the wand of the past was broken, its witchery impotent, its spell disenchanted. He had neither part nor life in the future they had painted so glowingly. Their joys could not henceforth be his, their sorrows could hardly touch him, their love availed nothing. Joy, sorrow, and love indeed

seemed words without meaning to him now.

At the foot of the hill the pair turned back to glance for the last time at the green-shuttered cottage on its airy perch, but no handkerchief was waved from the window, no parting signal held out by loving hands. They retraced their way sadly, yet not without consolation. All that friendship could do had at the last been done for him. This worst loneliness and sorrow were not of their making; the little they had given was at least better than what they had taken away.

What is happiness, indeed? Who can confer it upon his fellows? But to free one struggling soul from error, and to lift it into the light of truth, is benevolence

indeed, and not without its reward. On Gabriel, these two friends might now pass the immortal sentence uttered concerning a greater delinquent—

"Verdaderamente se muere, y verdaderamente esta cuerdo," said the curate, after hearing Don Quixote's last confession. "In truth he is dying, and in truth he is cured!"

THE END.

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